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THE  
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BY  
Sara Van Buren Brugière  
AND  
Adeline Brady

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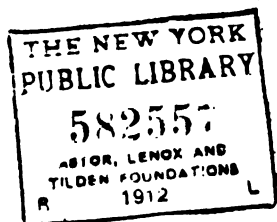
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TO  
THE MEMORY OF  
WILLIAM HOLME VAN BUREN,  
A. M., M. D., LL. D.

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# The Major's Niece.

II.

## HOME AGAIN.

It is already some years ago that the Stanley family stood on the deck of the "Mastodon," as that mighty ocean greyhound steamed up the Bay of New York.

They had been in Europe for several years, giving the girls and Jack the very best advantages foreign education could offer.

What these advantages are as compared with American home-education will not be discussed just at this moment, but there certainly was a great diversity of opinion as to whether Major Stanley had done quite the wisest thing in keeping his son Jack over on the other side so long. Of course, he had been back more than once in the course of those six years, but was that enough to keep him American-hearted? On the other hand, as long as the fellow was not obliged to go into business, was it not perhaps just as well to store his mind with interests of the many

kinds only to be found among the historic monuments, galleries, museums and endless art-treasures of the Old World? So far, Jack was apparently a good fellow, and a gentleman. As for the girls, Lilian and her cousin, Nora Seymour, were a pair well-equipped for presentation to the society world of New York.

The time had come, so Mrs. Stanley had judged, when the girls should make their *début* at home, and enjoy the sort of pleasure that girls cannot get abroad—that is to say, on the Continent. They had, for the moment, got all that they could out of their European life, and were now come to their old home to get the best that unlimited wealth and unassailable social position could give them there.

Major Stanley had passed his earlier life in the regular army, but had resigned when opportunity had offered what he then thought better advantages. He had had the luck to amass an immense fortune. He was not in the first flush of youth when he married, and his same good luck had guided him in the choice of a wife, herself no mean heiress. Her tastes were his, as far as he had any, and she had besides, on her own account, a quiet, secret store of social ambition, which, however, never went beyond the bounds of absolute discretion and taste.

The best of everything was theirs. Mrs. Stanley had few cares or anxieties, a good-natured, amiable old husband, an excellent good fellow of a son, and the prettiest daughter to be found from sunrise to sunset of a summer's day.

Blonde of the blondest, Lilian Stanley seemed to shed light about her from her yellow curls, dazzling pink and white skin and sparkling blue eyes—no eyes could be bluer. She was essentially a person who made an impression of sunshine; was very merry in disposition and given to much rippling laughter. A most attractive creature.

One of Mrs. Stanley's rare anxieties awhile back had been lest her son Jack should fall in love with his cousin Nora, the orphan niece whom they had brought up as their own, these six years past. But Jack seemed to consider her only in the light of another sister, and indeed appeared (brother-like) hardly conscious of the fact that Nora was really a very attractive, pretty girl. So, after discreetly and silently watching Jack for some time after Nora's hair had been pinned up and her skirts lengthened, Mrs. Stanley felt quite reassured, and put aside this one crumpled rose-leaf of anxiety.

To find a suitable dwelling, put it in such order and perfection as her very refined taste demanded; to prepare herself and the girls for a winter campaign which should be a perfect success, furnished quite enough pre-occupation and interest for this lady's practical, philosophical mind.

And what shall be told of Nora? All story-book heroines are, and ought to be, wonderfully beautiful. It is niggardly of an author to deprive them of what is dependent only on a stroke of the pen. But my friend Nora, whose little story is here written, is a very real person—not one bit a heroine of romance. That she is good-looking is not to be denied, but to

say that she is a beauty would be going too far. Her brown hair is wavy and of rare abundance. It has a glint of gold in the high-lights. Her skin is sweet and fresh as early spring flowers. But I cannot analyze her features or tell you the exact proportions of her nose and mouth. Her eyes, yes, those I can describe; grey, with dark lashes. Eyes that looked directly at you, and (some people averred) at times through you; eyes that gave you the impression that their owner, like George Washington, could not tell a lie.

Another striking thing about Nora—in fact, *the* striking thing—but so indefinable that one must not even attempt to analyze it, was her charm. This last is what makes it so impossible to tell you just how pretty she was or was not, for charm is quite independent of beauty, and much rarer. Think for a moment, if you have knocked about the world much, of the thousands of pretty faces you have seen, and of the few scattered ones who had heaven-given charm. Why, you are a lucky mortal if the fingers of one hand do not quite equal them in number.

No doubt this was what Mrs. Stanley recognized and feared for Jack. She had far more brilliant projects for him than a commonplace marriage with his own cousin! A girl with a modest income of her own, who could not contribute anything by wealth or name to increase the family prestige.

So they stood on the deck, looking into that unknown future with nothing but pleasure, enjoyment, gayety and social success in prospect.

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the only suitable one to use. In society she had the same sway as in her own home—everything that heart could desire was hers. She had but to express a wish, and it was only a question of who should be the first to gratify it. A very spoiled child of fortune. But she did not abuse her power to the extent of being tyrannical, rather ruling over her court of admirers like a condescending and gracious queen.

Every callow youth, every college-boy in town was over head and ears in love with her. Even older men, too, followed in her train; in fact, all kinds who love a pretty face and merry youth.

Nora also had her own little court, but never seemed in any way to clash with her more showy cousin, for she appealed to admiration of a different kind. Many maturer men who had seen much of the world were drawn to her by her peculiar charm. And shall I tell you a secret that she would not for worlds have reach her cousin's ears? That first winter she had more offers of marriage from men of solid position than Lilian herself. It almost looked as though one had success, as it were, in quantity, and the other in quality, of admiration. Each had so distinctly her own style that there was no clashing, no jealousy—a condition of things as desirable as edifying.

Whereas, for instance, Lilian was an indefatigable and enthusiastic dancer, it was not long before non-dancing men discovered that Nora was quite as well content to "talk out" a dance. Some of those admirers of the first season even got so far as to discover also that she had, back of her sweet face, a positively intellectual mind. Had they studied her farther, they might have discovered that, apart from the world in which she moved and made herself so well liked, she lived in another world of her own, into which it fell to the lot of few to be admitted.

Nora had not always lived in her present surroundings. Her dead parents had not always enjoyed

everything of the smoothest and most delightful in this life. Up to the age of thirteen, when the last one had died and she had been so kindly adopted by her uncle and his wife, she had been brought face to face with much that seemed to her far more real than her present life. Often she said to herself that instead of months only, there must be years of difference between her age and that of her cousin.

When the girls first came home from Europe and burst upon admiring New York society (you must remember the sensation they created that first night they went to the Opera—their box quite divided honors with the famous singer of the evening), it was already the fashion to go out of town for New Year's Day. Society had wearied itself irretrievably with sitting up in its feminine best to receive calls, or, in its masculine best to patter about in the slush which was never known to fail on that day, with the sole alternative of hiring extortionate hackney-coachmen. Now, on the contrary, you must seem to be out of town even if you are not. You must tie a card-basket on your door. The front of the house must look sombre and deserted, and only your most intimate bosom-friend may know if you are shut up within.

Of course the young Stanleys did not have to resort to any such subterfuge, for they had their choice of house-parties to go to, and among all decided to accept the invitation of their very intimate friends, the Persés.

It was none other than Mrs. Stanley herself who

had insisted upon the acceptance of the Persés' invitation in preference to all the others, and the excellence of her judgment will be admitted after the briefest glance at the conditions involved.

In the first place, the Persés were not only as rich as the Stanleys themselves, but, further than this, there was a legend current to the effect that a thin stream of blue blood had for many centuries trickled through the veins of the Persés, who claimed kinship with the great family of Percy, of ducal lineage. Moreover, in this most aristocratic family were a son and a daughter, and, if Jack did not fall a victim to the fascinations of the girl, Mrs. Stanley was at least confident of the irresistibleness of her own daughter. She thought the opportunity of a few days in the ease and enforced intimacy of a house-party more than likely to result in something definitely matrimonial with one or other of the couples.

A friendship had been in process of cultivation between the two mothers, who were tacitly agreed to encourage the matter as being perfectly satisfactory to all concerned. If the Stanleys were not quasi-royal in lineage, they were at least most aristocratic, as far as untitled Americans can be—and so colossally wealthy!



### III.

#### DUKE'S LODGE.

So the young Stanleys went at the appointed time to the Persés in the Berkshire Hills.

The country-house rejoiced in the name of Duke's Lodge, in compliment to the shade of their distant and musty ancestor.

Everything, from the fine iron gates of the park entrance to the house itself and its liveried servants, proclaimed the deep respect in which they held the honor of their descent and the responsibility they felt of doing justice to it.

The house was an old-fashioned one built by some early Governor or other colonial grandee who liked big rooms and high ceilings, and all that had since been done to it only served to heighten the impression of stateliness. A fitting abode for blue blood in its enforced sojourn in an alien land.

There was a dignity, a courtliness about the father of the family which tended to make amends for his over-long nose and retreating forehead and chin. These, in ordinary folk, might have been a sign of weakness of character and lack of intellect,

but were in his case the hereditary type of the Persés, and therefore, by that fact, aristocratic.

As for Madam Persé, with her white hair done à la Pompadour and her pervading air of superiority, she was well calculated to impress the most democratic-minded.

There was with the elders a certain something of the "rois en exile,"—as though they were, notwithstanding the elegance of their surroundings, still far from enjoying what would be due them in their ancestral home—England.

Of the young people of the family, J. Earle Persé, the son and heir, inherited the ancestral type: the narrow face, sloping forehead, retreating chin—the latter in his case modified by an artistically-trimmed beard; eyes that were too close and small; a nose shorter than that of his father, to be sure, but still too long for beauty. He was of good height and young, slim figure.

One annoying peculiarity about his appearance which is difficult to analyze: his clothes seemed always a trifle "more so" than those of other men. Not loud; but in some inexplicable way inharmonious, striking one's attention too forcibly, making it difficult to notice or remember him without thinking of his raiment.

Fortunately he did not carry it written on him, nor did his doting parents know, as we do, that his personal tastes and habits were by no means as stiff-starched as their own.

His sister Mildred, a bud in her first year, was disposed to appreciate and enjoy the good things which fortune brought in her way, but constantly hindered therefrom by nervous shyness and want of self-confidence. She was a diminutive creature with the straight, fine features of her mother, but in miniature, her only full-sized feature, her eyes, which were large, soft and intelligent. She was a gentle little soul.

"One couldn't help liking the little thing," thought Jack; "a nice girl, no doubt, if one could know her better—but it takes too much time." He passed a moment now and again at her side in his even distribution of attentions to all the pretty girls, but beyond this passing thought, and though her gazelle-like eyes often followed him, Mildred made no more impression on Jack than did the others.

In fact, there seemed to be something about Jack that rendered him charm-proof. He was never known to be more attentive to one girl than to another, yet devoted to all in general and of immense popularity. To those who chaffed him about his insensibility he would say in his off-hand way: "My dear fellow, I am a philosopher. At present I am enjoying life in a wholesale way; time enough ahead to come down to detail." Or: "Generalizing before particularizing;" and he carried out his principle to the letter.

#### IV.

##### SOME OF THE GUESTS AT THE HOUSE PARTY.

"Do you really assure me, Earle, that he is quite all right?" Madam Persé had asked, pausing with suspended pen over Guy Moore's name, as she and her son studied the list of proposed guests when they were planning the New Year's party.

Guy Moore had been Earle's special candidate for the honor of an invitation. He best knew why; he best knew the community of tastes that had drawn them together outside the buckram rigor of home.

"And why not, I should like to know?" Earle had retorted a trifle sharply.

"I have heard it whispered about that he was rather fast. I hope, if that is true, that you do not see too much of him, dear boy."

"Fast, mother? Not more so than most men. He is no prig; but that is nothing against him. I do not see why you should have any hesitation."

"You see, dear Earle, in our position we are obliged to be even over-particular. Naturally, whatever we do is known and commented by everyone, and we must be always careful to give the proper

'ton.' Admission to the Persé house is a passport to society."

"And certainly you can hardly begin by drawing the line at the brother of your dear Lady Chalkcliffe. It strikes me that her attentions to you in England are acceptable enough. I fancy she would not be quite so quick to lavish them on you if she knew that you baulked at her own brother." Which argument was so conclusive that Guy's name passed forth-with.

That is how Lilian Stanley came to meet this man who was in those days so seldom to be seen in the mansions of the great, his special tastes leading him elsewhere.

Had good Madam Persé known one tenth, nay, one fiftieth part of all that had gone to earn for Guy the reputation described by those four little letters *f-a-s-t*, she would have risked having an apoplexy at seeing him in her irreproachably correct abode, breathing its rarified air of aristocratic refinement.

Guy was not really a bad fellow at heart. On the contrary, he had so many excellent qualities that one could not but regret the more, his unfortunate failings. But he would gamble, he would drink, and no power on earth seemed strong enough to cure him, although, now and again, he would be as straight as a parson for a time. This was one of his good moments. Earle may have thought that he had really reformed—who can tell?

Guy was at that time an unusually good-looking

man of the type called by young girls, "interesting." He had great dark eyes of liquid, unfathomable depths, which by turns danced and sparkled, or melted into dreaminess, seeing, as it were, distant visions, unseen of common mortals. This was the impression made on the average young feminine observer. But in truth he had a very pleasant way with him, and it would not take a great effort of the maturer imagination to understand the fascination he might exert, should he ever think it worth his while to take the trouble.

Among the half-dozen Floras and Doras, besides our pretty Lillian and Nora and a corresponding number of possible or would-be swains, was a man differing in type from the others. He arrived a little after the party had assembled, and as he was presented by the hostess, both Lillian and Nora exclaimed inwardly, the one: "Oh! you beauty," and forthwith fell in love with him; the other: "What a fine face! What a splendid type of manliness! I wonder if he is as nice as he looks."

It was none other than Paul King, the man who, though hardly over thirty, had already earned such a reputation as a traveler. He, like Guy, was no frequenter of drawing-rooms; but in his case the rival charm lay in the free life of the out-door world. He preferred the wide, open prairies, the free air of Heaven, and found infinitely greater enjoyment in hunting and fishing, in studying new countries, new peoples, new ways, to flirting and playing the *beau cavalier* under drawing-room lights.

"I feel rather out of place, to tell the truth," he said later on to Nora, "but I have made it a solemn duty to return at stated intervals to civilized society, simply to keep from drifting too completely into being a backwoodsman."

"The contrast must amuse your fancy and imagination, I should think, from what you tell me of your rough life."

"Yes; contrasts have a special charm for me. To pass months in flannel shirts, top-boots, a slouch hat, with a gun on one's shoulder, and then come into this," indicating with a turn of his handsome head the luxurious, well-lighted room and its swarm of social butterflies. "Still, I am so used to my life that I find three months now and again all I can stand without getting home-sick for the freedom of it all."

"I am only a beginner, myself," said Nora; "but I can well imagine that in time this sort of thing might pall on one. It is delightful, however, while the novelty lasts."

"Then there are old friends to be looked up, to keep them from forgetting one. After all, the older one grows, the more one realizes that nothing takes the place of the friends of one's earliest years. Look at Jack Stanley, for instance—no one in the world could take his place. He is your cousin, is he not?"

"My brother," corrected Nora.

"Brother-cousin, then let us say. Well, I have known him since we were boys together at school. There is a difference of five years between us, but

as he was very quick and I was very slow, that helped to span the gap."

Nora looked at him, half-smiling, to see if he, in his masculine vanity, expected some flattering contradiction of his humble self-estimate. But his fine face was quite earnest. She did not stop to analyze her impression, but the expression of his face struck her as being more distinctly agreeable than even the regularity of his fine features. It flashed through her mind that it was a face that inspired a sense of trust and friendship.

"Another lodestone that civilized life and great centres have for me is music. That one cannot get enough of elsewhere, unless it be the music of brooks, trees and birds. But beyond that I must have, now and again, a feast of Metropolitan Opera and Symphony Concerts, if it be New York, or Colonne, Padeloup and the Grand Opera, if it be Paris."

"Do you sing or play yourself?"

"Sing—yes—*tant bien que mal*. I am better off in that respect than if I played, for even in the Wilds I can, like Cooper's old fellow, take my 'tunin' weapon' with me, and sing under the blue vault of Heaven.—By-the-way, who is the charming little girl in pink and white? I did not catch her name. I am sure I have already seen her hanging in the window of the 'Nain Bleu' on the Boulevard des Capucines in Paris. Do you remember that most fascinating of doll-shops?"

"I do indeed," said Nora, looking up with a smile. "It is one of my earliest delightful recollections of

Paris when I was still almost a child.—The 'little girl' is my cousin, Miss Stanley. She is not really so awfully young."

"Is that Jack's sister? I do not think I ever saw anything quite so young-looking out of the school-room. She certainly does not look over fifteen, whereas you—" and Paul turned his handsome, brown eyes scrutinizingly upon Nora. "But there—I am verging on an impertinence."

"Finish it then: 'Whereas you look twenty-five.'"

"No; twenty without the five. What a long step a girl makes from nineteen to twenty! She steps directly into responsible womanhood, leaving all childishness behind her. Or, at least, that is one's theory about it. Here comes our young host to talk to you. Ought I not to go and speak to Jack's little sister? I see a break in the circle about her."

Paul made way for Earle, and was soon laughing heartily with Lilian, whose bright, merry ways only served to deepen his first impression of her extreme youthfulness. It would have been out of the question to try to talk seriously with her, playful, light-hearted, ingenuous little kitten that she was!

## V.

### BEWITCHER BEWITCHED.

As Paul King was rich as well as handsome and of unimpeachably good position, he was made a lion of on the occasions of his re-appearances in town. The fact of it being difficult to secure him made him all the more sought after. Lilian, pleased and flattered by his notice, was convinced within a week's time, before the party at Duke's Lodge broke up, that, if she did not manage to capture for herself this biggest, handsomest, most delightful of men, she would die of a broken heart. She was in love.

Lilian, as we have seen, had had plenty of experience with the rank and file of society's beaux, but this was the first time anything so important, so altogether desirable had come in her way. There was, moreover, a fascination in exerting her wiles upon this magnificent "wild man of the woods," as she dubbed him. She was proud when she stood beside him and he looked down at her smilingly and kindly with those glorious dark eyes of his!

Mrs. Paul King must she be or die in her attempt to win him. She gave this assurance to herself in exaggerated, high-sounding words, but smiled sweet-

ly at the same time, knowing well how irresistible she was, and how it had never been necessary for her to do more than wish for a thing in order to have it.

She was satisfied that Paul liked her; that was evident. It only rested with herself to develop that liking into something more to the point. Lilian had, of course, had a dozen flitting fancies since she had begun to pin up her back hair, but now she scorned the memory of those childish follies, throwing her entire imagination, will, fancy, every motive power that she could command, or was governed by, into the present case. She was seriously in love for the first time in her life, and this was to her, naturally, a very important event.

This did not interfere, however, in the smallest degree with Lilian's appreciation of the society of other men—notably that of Guy Moore. It would be a thousand pities to let their agreeable acquaintance lapse then and there. He was certainly charming—above all, so interesting.

It was quite clear to her that Earle Persé was in no way smitten by her charms, as in the programme he should have been. Nora was apparently more to his taste;—Nora who, having been introduced to society not as a poor relation, but as adopted by Major Stanley, was therefore subject to no invidious comparisons, though Mrs. Stanley had certainly not included her in the present matrimonial scheme.

Lilian bore Nora no grudge, satisfying her soul with being in love with Paul, and amusing herself in the interval, just for practice, with trying her pow-

ers of fascination upon Guy. She was succeeding so well in her preliminary exercises with the latter that his head was fairly turned. Never in his six-and-twenty years had anything like this present experience fallen to his lot. Never had he been so absolutely bewitched, captivated, as by this fair girl.

Guy had not imagined it possible that any created being could so suddenly and completely possess him. Impulsive fellow that he was, once he recognized the fact, he gave himself up absolutely to it; thought, dreamt of but one object, lived but in the one hope of some day making Lilian his wife.

So swiftly and strongly did this love assume dominion over him, that from that very moment at Duke's Lodge he vowed to himself to fly his strongest temptations and train himself to become good enough for her?—no, that could never be, pure-souled angel! But, at least not too unworthy.

So, after days spent in sleighing, skating, tobogganing, evenings in skating by torch or moonlight, or indoors, in music, theatricals, games, etc., and all the usual diversions of such parties, the time came to part. In the hearts of more than one was borne away the consciousness that this house-party marked for them an epoch in their lives, wondering what would be the outcome of it.

As far as any effort necessary on the part of Lilian to ensure further enjoyment of the two charming men she had just met, she failed not to make it, and parted from each (separately) with a murmured "au revoir," and a look that he might carry away to remember her by.

## VI.

Meanwhile, though distinguishing her by no marked attentions, it came to be very natural and agreeable to Paul to drop into a chair by Nora's side. She was restful; required no effort to talk to; was ready to adapt herself with quickest intuition to every shade of mood.

How little time it takes for kindred souls to recognize one another! From almost the first exchange of ideas, this traveled man of the world (in a wider sense than is generally meant) and this young girl were instinctively drawn toward one another in a kind of unconscious trust and confidence. By the time the house-party broke up, each carried away an impression of the other as of something absolutely distinct, apart. It would be too much to say that they were in love with each other: love with such natures is a thing of slower growth, striking deep, firm roots.

Paul King was not a man in search of excitement. He was too old; had knocked about too much. Moreover, love and marriage were questions which he had, as it were, set aside for consideration later on, when the pleasure of travel should have lost

its zest; when the day should come which would bring to him a craving for a settled life. Then it would be time enough to look about him and choose a fitting companion. Until then, freedom! So thinking, he would throw back his broad shoulders and fill his big lungs with the air of sea, of mountain, of cañon, wherever he might be, enjoying with a keen sense that freedom which was to him so precious. Time enough until it must perforce be yielded to accumulating years,—to the unforeseen.



## VII.

### TEA AND TALK.

The Persé house party had been a great success in every way save that planned by the two mothers for the certain happiness of their children. But they were undaunted by momentary failure, knowing that such matters require time, of which there was plenty and to spare, all concerned being still young. After talking the matter over *à huis clos*, they agreed upon a repetition of the experiment by a Maying-party in the season of buds and blossoms.

So the scattered party took up again the various threads of their lives. At the Stanley house, however, there was a change in the gradual admission, first as occasional visitors, then as intimates, of Guy Moore and Paul King. Another faithful habitué was none other than Earle Persé himself. Notwithstanding all the tact he tried to exercise in bestowing equal attention in general matters on both girls, it was not long before Lilian's sharp eyes were struck by a thousand small evidences of his preference for Nora. She was perfectly amicable and good-natured about it, generously yielding to Nora the man she



did not wish to marry, now that the whole of her little soul was absorbed in Paul King.

This fancy did not diminish. On the contrary, begun almost as a bit of childish caprice and vanity, it had taken possession of her absolutely. She soon arrived at the point of being unable to consider a future of any sort in which Paul did not take part. Hence it was that she was quite willing that Nora should be well-provided for. The latter would, of course, accept when, equally as a matter of course, Earle should in time propose.

So rapid is the flight of sanguine youth's imagination that Lilian had the entire matter arranged and the dénouement planned presto, presto,—even to the bridesmaids, wedding cake and all. It was hard to be patient and wait for the actors concerned to go through their little parts, so anxious was she to have it all settled.



## VIII.

JACK.

Lilian and Nora had their special den which they dubbed "the Growlery." There the girls rested or worked at whatever interested them in the way of occupation.

On one side stood the piano with its piles of music. Lilian had a high, clear soprano voice and an amount of flexibility and execution that would have enabled her to support herself as an artist, had she required to do so. She trilled like a bird, and sang just as easily and naturally as her feathered prototype. It was no effort whatever, but a source of sincere joy to her. It was, moreover, pleasant to give people pleasure and win applause so easily.

Nora had a mezzo-soprano voice and sang duets with her cousin, not often figuring as a soloist, her delicate tact prompting her not to vie with the daughter of the house where she evidently enjoyed being first. Its best quality was a certain something that touched one's feelings and set one's mind on tender thoughts. A voice more to charm away sorrow and sadness from the heart than for general drawing-room use.



In the Growlery were many book-shelves well enough supplied for desultory reading. In the further corner, where the best light fell upon it from the window, a little easel. That was Nora's corner.

On the short January days when night closed in early, this was a cozy room, with its shaded lamps and bright wood fire, and Jack not unseldom found his way thither for an hour's gossip before the time to prepare for dinner; his "Causeries du Growlerie," as he dubbed them.

There is his knock now: "May I come in, girls, and warm myself by your fire? My chimney does not draw as well as yours—or else you have more of a knack at keeping the fire going than I have."

"Come in—come in. There is a nice low chair for you. Put your feet on the fender and we will have a gossip," says Nora.

"I suppose you have no tea for me?"

"Yes, certainly; in one half minute you shall have it," and she busied herself making fresh tea for the rather late guest.

"I know what a help it is in the matter of gossip, and I want to hear all you have been doing since our last."

"For my part," said Lilian, "I am tired to death, and if I am to dance and sing and put on my prettiest party manners this evening, I shall take the benefit of your being only a brother, and go to rest; whereupon she picked up the novel she had been reading and went to her room.

"Seems to be having a great success and no end of

a good time," said Jack, indicating the retreating one with a slight bend of the head in her direction. "You have it all your own way, too, Nora. I must say you are a very good second-best. Do you know, I sometimes think to myself, as I watch your admirers flocking about you, that you might even be first-best if you chose to take the trouble. But you are lazy, Nora; lacking in proper ambition."

"I am afraid you are right about the last, Jack—more than about the first. But it is all very nice, and I do enjoy myself immensely. There would be something strange and abnormal about me if I did not. Now tell me about yourself; that is a much more interesting subject. What have you been doing with yourself?"

"Oh, much the same as usual; sleeping, eating, walking, flirting with the pretty girls—same old routine! No—by-the-way, not quite. I have been on a prowling expedition among the antiquarian shops—at least such as I could find. Alas, alas! What a void is created in my life by the absence of my good old friends the antiquaries on the other side! So different, so many more! Here everything is culled out to suit the fashionable taste of the moment; there one does one's own culling. There is all the added excitement of the hunt—and what delightful surprises now and again!"

Nora laughed merrily as Jack, mounted on his hobby, galloped to his heart's content.

"How about your collection, have you found anything new to add to it?"

"No—no. Perhaps a miniature or two; but I have not made up my mind about them. You will have to give me the benefit of your valuable opinion. I find you have an artistic eye," and Jack laughed, too, a little maliciously. "Your success with old Paul King's likeness that evening at Duke's Lodge put you immediately in the front rank of portraitists—no question about that."

"You are a tease, Jack. It certainly was hard to be obliged to try twice at it, for some of you were really clever; but people see others so differently. It was Lilian who thought I made him as cross and glum as a bear; so I did him over again with so sweet and smiling an expression as should have satisfied the most critical."

"Yes," said Jack. "Lilian said it was more natural. That was the expression he always wore when in conversation with her."

Here a voice from the next room protested: "You will say anything, Jack, for the sake of a good story."

"Perhaps this time there is more truth than poetry in my remark," answered Jack to the invisible one, looking at Nora with a twinkle in his eye. "People not only see others differently, but again others may show themselves differently. Perhaps Paul King reserves that sombre and ferocious expression which Nora first put on paper, all for her benefit. She may not exert the same mollifying influence over him that you do. By-the-way, I met Paul King to-day; in fact, he went prowling with me. Seemed glad of anything that made a change from feasting and fes-

tivities. He's a philosopher; manages his pleasures so that he never gets blasé. I suppose he will be able to enjoy things all his life. Just enough of civilized society to keep him from forgetting his good manners, then off again, perhaps to the wilds. He was telling me the charm of such a life, and, by Jove, I believe he has got the right of it. He is never happier, he says, than when he first gets back to his flannel shirt and slouch hat, and feels his friendly old gun on his shoulder. He expects to be off again in a couple of months. I'd half like to go with him."

Nora looked amused. "I cannot picture to myself such a sybarite as you imitating your friend. No, Jack, unless you ruin yourself as a collector of antiquities or fall hopelessly in love, I cannot imagine you taking to such a life. Thank goodness, for your sake, neither of these dangers seems imminent."

Jack settled himself more comfortably in his chair and pursued the subject of his hobby.

"No, Nora, you will not have the satisfaction of seeing your prophecies come true—at least as regards the antiquities. I have bought well—very judiciously, thus far. Now the spirits of my money-making ancestors torment me with a regret that I did not buy more while I had the chance, and sell here. When I hear the outrageous prices asked for things that I would not own, it makes me—But, by Jove, it is already dressing-time, and we have not yet got to the gossip."

As he rose to leave, he put his head in at the door of Lilian's room to find that young lady in a

dainty, loose gown, lying on her sofa, with the electric light staring down over her head, lost in her novel.

"There is a pink and white creation, a picture of luxurious idleness and comfort for you! Luckily there is one sister to give a poor beggar a cup of tea and listen to his story. By-by."

Jack liked these friendly chats, and it became such a customary thing for him to drop in for his cup of tea, that his chair and corner of the fender were always ready.

"It is nice to have you come," Nora told him, "for it is a rest to be able to talk at ease with a sensible, brotherly fellow who does not waste his time paying compliments and falling in love."

"A conceited speech, my dear Nora; but I forgive it for the sake of the implied compliment—which perhaps you don't really mean as such!"



## LX.

### NORA TRIES MINIATURE PAINTING.

The following day, in looking through her portfolio for something she wanted, Nora came across the rejected sketch of Paul King of which Jack and she had talked. She took it up and studied the face with those criticisms fresh in mind, pondering Jack's suggestion that people not only see others differently, but that others show themselves in different lights—for certainly to her eyes, and to her memory of him, that which was most striking in Paul's face was its earnest thoughtfulness when in repose; a face full of calm strength and purpose.

Nora took a keen interest in the study of character as expressed by physiognomy, and the more she studied that particular head, the more she liked it. Both her artistic eye and her mind were well satisfied with the type of man it represented to her. The criticism called forth, mild as it was, roused in her the desire to try her hand again at the same subject, endeavoring this time to express even more clearly the interpretation she made of it.

Nora had for some years past devoted much time and study to drawing and colors, chiefly to studies of



still-life, and occasional heads. It was at Duke's Lodge one afternoon when the weather had been too bad to tempt anyone out, that one of the party had suggested drawing likenesses and cutting silhouettes of each other, and it had been given to Nora to do Paul King's head, as we have seen. It had been her first experiment at likenesses, and had given her a new sort of interest. Now the same subject aroused in her the ambition to try again, and many pleasant hours did she spend secretly over her task, utilizing such brief moments as she could feel sure of having undisturbed. This time she worked in colors, and tried to make the style of her work as nearly like miniature-painting as she knew how to do, longing all the time for guidance and proper instruction in the art.

The farther Nora went in her work, the more fascinated she became. There grew upon her steadily the conviction that she had it in her to succeed, too, if only she had a fair chance to study. Oh for some lessons from the famous Mademoiselle Félicien, whose wonderful work she had so much admired in Paris! Why had not this ambition dawned upon her sooner, when the opportunity to gratify it had been within reach? Why, indeed. It had lain dormant until Paul King had accidentally caused her to discover it.

She longed to find out if she really had any aptitude, but dared show no one what she was doing from an uncomfortable fear of being misunderstood and chaffed about her subject—which would be intoler-

ably nonsensical. She naturally seized every opportunity of studying her model's head, features, expression, not only on the many occasions when they were thrown together socially, but at other times quite out of society's ways.

Nora shared with some rare survivors of ancient notions, the idea that there was no time of the day for exercise like the early morning. Not when the lark sang, to be sure, but an hour when most of the girls of her set, who had been out to a dance over-night, were taking their rest and trying to catch up that beauty-sleep which they lost at the proverbial time.

To get out betimes meant taking an early cold bath to wake her up thoroughly from the drowsiness of her over-night vigils, and then a light breakfast such as she had grown accustomed to in foreign lands; then off for a brisk walk.

Paul King had discovered this eccentricity in a conversation with Nora at dinner, and by a very strange coincidence, he, from that time on, found remarkably often that, on his morning walk, his path crossed hers. It was only due to common politeness that on such occasions he should walk on a little way with her, as she was pleased to say she had no objection, until by degrees her morning walk and talk with Paul King became almost as frequent as her afternoon tea and talk with Jack.

Both men were easy to talk to and intelligent, and it was pleasant to have a chance of listening, as well

as talking on other subjects besides those which furnished the small-talk of balls and dinners.

Of the trio, Jack had, perhaps, more taste for society-life, but he, too, was glad enough of a certain amount of unconventionality. The constraint of town life did not, in his case, so quickly come to the point of being positively irksome. He did not have the same craving for the free open as Paul, or for the liberty to follow her particular tastes and bents as Nora. There were enough similarities in their styles of mind to give them sympathy, and just enough difference to make them interesting and stimulating to one another.

Nora was at this time very happy, for she was managing to serve two masters: the exigencies of the world and her own personal tastes. She had congenial intimates. Life, in short, seemed very pleasant. But she kept a great deal of her enjoyment secret within her own breast, for the same reason that she kept her efforts at miniature-painting to herself; she shrank from being chaffed and discussed at home, as is inevitably the case among brothers and sisters. She was, as a rule, quite ready to enter into any fun that was afoot, and ready to take her share of chaffing; but this seemed quite an outside matter, one that concerned nobody but herself.

So she studied Paul's head for his portrait, and at the same time studied Paul's mental make-up, which diverted and interested her because of its individuality.

To her it seemed as though the strong sinews of his principles were overlaid by a kindly, good-natur-

ed philosophy, completed by broad tolerance. He was different from the common herd of men without being in the least degree eccentric. In fact, he left upon her mind the impression that it was rather he who was natural, more normal, while those who differed from him were the eccentrics.

To take a brisk walk with him through Central Park over the crisp snow or frozen ground, with the cold winter wind blowing in her face and filling her lungs, brought her back to her home with rosy cheeks and a sense of stimulation of mind as well as of circulation. She was bright-eyed, cheerful, in a good humor with herself and with the world at large, and with an ever-growing determination to make something of herself yet by her brush.

THE FIRST SHADOW.

The next time Jack came in for his cup of tea, Nora again inquired if he had decided on the purchase of the miniatures he had in contemplation, and from these in particular the conversation turned naturally to his collection in general, Nora begging the loan of one or two of the best of these precious treasures, that she might study them and see *why* they were best—what it was that made them so. She also drew from Jack himself whatever small stock of knowledge he had on the subject. This proved, however, not to amount to very much, for, so far, that branch of his collection was more interesting to him through the pleasure it gave to his eye, together with the satisfaction of ownership, than through any great learning in the matter. Therefore Nora had to take what help she could from the silent instruction of good workmanship, and content herself with trying to imitate what she saw there.

Paul King's likeness she completed as far as she knew how. The result was a clever study frightfully over-worked. She had, in her earnestness, done too much to it. That, of course, she could not know,

but she felt that there was something wrong in her method, while, at the same time, she was pleased with herself for the success of the likeness. This gave her renewed encouragement, and having quietly locked away her first experiment, she now spoke openly of her ambition, and asked Lilian to let her make a study of her, which the latter was not averse to, provided it entailed no effort on her own part.

Remembering Lilian's objection to what she termed the glumness of the first Paul King sketch, Nora set herself the task of representing all that was sunniest, most sparkling and merry in her cousin's face.

It was while watching and waiting at odd moments to catch such expression as she wanted for her work, that Nora noticed how very often Lilian's face wore, on the contrary, now a troubled look, now one of petulance, and again one of actual sadness. It almost startled her at first, but she remembered, on second thought, that she, Nora, was pursuing only one object, and it simply called her attention to the fact of how strangely general impressions can prevail which it is difficult to account for. Surely Lilian's face seemed bright and sunny, yet see how many shadows there were that did not strike the casual observer! And Nora dismissed from her mind much of the surprise she had at first felt, setting this down as the, no doubt, frequent experience of the portrait-painter; arguing strongly with herself against undertaking a work of the kind with any foregone judgment of the model.

Had she yielded to her present impression, however, there would have appeared, together with the merry, bright expression of the eyes, a little pathetic touch about the mouth, which would have given a very different idea of her cousin from that which would have pleased the latter.

While working and thinking over the matter, at times the question flashed through Nora's mind whether Lilian was in fact thoroughly happy; whether a face such as she was discovering Lilian's to be, could in reality be the index of a light, happy heart? Another question for the student of faces. But as Lilian made no confidences of any griefs or troubles, but only of successes and conquests, Nora could only smile at herself for an imaginative dreamer.

This time her work proved much more successful in every way. A decided step forward as to workmanship, and as for the likeness, the subject of it expressed herself as quite taken aback with pleasure and amazement.

The precious miniature was proudly exhibited to all most concerned, and Nora experienced a keen satisfaction to find herself able to accomplish even this much. Success nerved her to greater diligence, and painting became for the time the chief occupation of her life—or, at least, she fancied it was.

Moments had, however, to be stolen for her studies. They were few enough, for Nora was every day proving a more and more necessary assistant to Mrs. Stanley in the arrangement and management of the social business of the house. Lilian had little

taste or inclination for such things, preferring the enjoyment of the outcome of those efforts. She was, moreover, so pre-occupied with the part she herself played in these social duties, what with dressing, visiting, teaing, driving, dancing, that she bid fair to be over-worked with these alone, good Mrs. Stanley thought, and refrained from laying a straw's weight of responsibility upon her lovely daughter.

## XL

### A WORD OF WARNING.

The winter was already wearing on toward Lent when, one snowy, disagreeable afternoon, Jack knocked and put his head in at the Growlery door, with his usual: "May I come in?"

This time it was with a roll of music in his hand. "I have come to ask you, Lilian, if you won't help me with this song. One of those 500 charming girls has been seized with a conviction that I can sing, and you know I never had the heart to refuse a pretty girl anything! I am to learn the second of this. Come—there's a good girl. Help me."

Both girls laughed a merry peal over Jack's rueful countenance, for it was evident that this new role was not half to his liking. He had never treated his rather nice voice seriously, nor proposed to make of it a drawing-room entertainment.

"That is just how one gets into no end of scrapes. It is rather wearing. I'm tired too, for that fellow Paul King has been showing me his idea of a jolly time, and has been trotting me about in this snow until I am worn out. He's an odd fish, I will say. Tells me he is a socialist—but a socialist according

to his own idea. Thinks that no man has a right to any more money than he needs. He considers that every man who has more income than he requires for his own expenses (according to his condition) is in conscience bound to distribute the surplus among those poorer than himself."

Having given the girls this solid morsel to think over, he looked at them for an opinion in response. For a moment both were silent. Then Lilian shrugged her shoulders slightly and with infinite grace:

"What an uncomfortable theory for one's family," was her comment. Nora thought a moment, and then, as if dismissing further consideration of either Paul King or his theories, she said:

"Another way of putting the old idea of the Good Samaritan. If only it were more often put into practice! Come, let us have the song, or some of Lilian's engagements will be calling her away."

"How like women that is! You shunt poor old Paul and his doctrines off on one side with a more or less polite word, and then—turn over the page! Why is it that women always take so much more interest in scapegraces and good-for-nothings? I suppose if my friend were some miserable, flirting, drinking, commonplace fellow, you'd encourage me to talk about him indefinitely. You are both just like the rest of your sex.

"By the way, girls, joking apart, and without any desire of making unfavorable criticisms, I see that fellow Guy Moore coming here a good deal, first and last. I know you are both too sensible to

take him seriously, and a word to the wise is sufficient. But you know he is not awfully well received in society. I don't like to say things against any man, but when a fellow has sisters he's bound to look after them a little. I just want to say that he's—not exactly one of our set.”

“And yet we met him at the very best house in town! What rubbish! There is nothing so absolutely low as back-biting,” said Lilian sententiously. “If you want me to try your song, come,” and she rose to put an end to further argument.

Tum-te-tum tum-la-la-la. Then: “Oh! that we two were May, ay, ay-ing,” sang they, forgetting their differences as they became absorbed in their efforts to make the song “go” properly.

While the brother and sister were singing with attention wholly absorbed, the servant brought Nora a card. She rose quietly and slipped out of the room, careful not to disturb them by any irrelevant remark.

When the practicing was over and the song in a fair way to be mastered, they left the piano, and in passing, Lilian picked up the card Nora had laid on the table as she went out.

“J. Earle Persé,” she read. “Funny time of day to come in such weather. He's not one of your mountain-climbing, snow-tramping *enragés*. He must have brought some message from Mildred—or,” and Lilian looked at Jack with a beaming smile: “perhaps he has come to propose! What a glorious idea!” And she clapped her hands and frisked about like the dear little kitten that she was.

"Of course you have noticed how marked his attentions are, Jack? Or more probably you have not, for there is no created being so obtuse as a brother!"

Jack was amused at Lilian's glee. It was certainly very nice of his sister to be so pleased at the bare suggestion of the possibility of Nora being her successful rival in obtaining what he knew to be the desire of the family's heart for Lilian herself.

## **XII.**

### **A BAD QUARTER OF AN HOUR.**

Meanwhile, Nora betook herself to the drawing-room, wondering a little bit what might be Earle Persé's errand.

As he came forward on her entrance to shake hands, Nora noticed the particular elegance of his attire. He was a man who was always noticeable on account of his clothes, why, it was difficult to say; for when one examined him critically, there seemed nothing very striking, but, for some unexplained reason, he was always just a trifle more remarkable than his fellows. Nora had been struck by this fact ever since she had known him, and, without quite understanding why, it had constituted an unacknowledged prejudice against him. She especially disliked eccentricity of any kind in a man's dress, associating it in her mind with caddishness.

"How energetic of you to venture out in this storm," said Nora, by way of opening the conversation, thinking within herself the while what incompatibility there was between his appearance and the idea of a man prepared to face the elements in their present condition.

"I thought I should make more certain of finding you at home—you are usually so busy."

The conversation halted. He was tongue-tied, but looked determined, business-like and much pre-occupied.

"Your mother and Mildred are, I trust, both well, this cold weather?" Nora felt called upon to say something, and he was a man who inspired absolutely no conversational ideas.

"Very—thank you," he answered. Then, after a pause, "They would no doubt have sent messages had they known I was coming, for they like you very much, Miss Seymour."

Nora felt duly grateful for their approval of her, and expressed as much.

None of these remarks furnished to her mind the smallest suggestion for further conversation. She was wishing in her heart of hearts that he had not come just then to disturb her pleasant afternoon indoors, when Earle cleared his voice, and with a very solemn expression and most undoubted earnestness, proceeded:

"In fact I did not mention to them that I expected to see you. Indeed, I came to see you on private business. Miss Seymour—Nora," said he, drawing his chair nearer and endeavoring to take her hand; "You must have seen for some time what a deep impression you have made on my heart, and I have come to lay it at your feet, to offer you all I have and am—and, and—" here he quite lost himself in search of words proper to use on such an occasion.

"My dear Mr. Persé, please don't go any further, I beg of you! Oh, I am so sorry that you should make such a mistake about me! You are very flattering—very kind—but, indeed, I have never thought that you cared for me, or I would have saved you this. Indeed I never dreamt of such a thing!" Nora was quite sincere and would in truth have spared him, had he given her the smallest warning of what was impending.

"Perhaps you think I am not sufficiently in earnest, Nora, but I assure you, I love you most deeply—profoundly. How can I convince you of it?" And before Nora could stop him, he had slid down on one knee beside her and seized her hand.

Nora was in a perfect spasm of fear lest the drawing-room door should open and discover the poor man in this most humiliating attitude.

"Oh please, *please*, Mr. Persé, don't! Do get up, I beg of you. We can talk just as well and just as convincingly, I assure you, if only you will sit down."

The absurdity of the situation only struck her dimly at the moment, for she was so sincerely grieved and annoyed to have had this thing happen. She was a girl who had not the smallest ambition to count up her offers of marriage, and would in truth have gladly avoided the present one.

"Indeed, Mr. Persé, I am so sorry—and please don't think that I do not believe in your very kind feeling for me. You pay me the highest compliment you can possibly—but, indeed, I cannot marry you."

"But why, Nora—dear Nora," said Earle, clasp-

ing his own two hands in default of clasping hers, which she had hastened to withdraw.

"Why? For the simplest of all reasons, that I am not in love with you," and Nora looked at him not unkindly with her honest, grey eyes.

"But that is no real reason, Nora. Indeed, from what I am told, it is no reason at all now-a-days, and I could, if you consented, soon teach you to love me. I should be so good and kind to you, so thoughtful and considerate of every wish of yours, that you would soon learn."

Poor man, he really believed it, too!

But Nora, for all her gentle manner, was very firm, and assured him that it was quite outside the realm of possibility for her to marry any man whom she did not love, and therefore she could not accept him.

The poor fellow was unaffectedly distressed.

"Is there anyone else you do love—Nora—dear Nora—for, unless there is, I cannot take this as a final answer, and I will yet teach you to respond to my deep, my ardent admiration."

Nora rose to put an end to an interview which was beginning to strike her keen sense of the ridiculous—the vision of her ever being able to respond to his "deep and ardent admiration" savoring of the ludicrous. When she remembered her total lack of admiration even for his personal appearance, his hereditary retreating chin and close-set eyes, oh what a long time it would take to learn the lesson he proposed to teach her!

But she could not rest under the suspicion that there might be someone else in the way, and hastened to assure Mr. Persé that she was perfectly free—as far as that went; but begged him to make to himself no false illusions, as she was convinced that it was useless for him to deceive himself. She knew she could never consent to marry him.

“Oh that’s the way you feel now, Miss Nora, and I can well understand it,” said Earle, rising, too, and taking up his hat, while he mechanically shook out the leg on which he had knelt, having a subconsciousness, even at this intense moment, of the danger in which he stood of “knee-ing” his trouser leg. “It is only natural. I have startled you by my abruptness. You were unprepared. But I shall not give up. I shall try again later on, hoping for a very different answer another time, for now you will have a better chance of appreciating my feeling for you and understanding,” and he smiled such a confident smile that Nora almost stepped then and there from indifference to active dislike.

“Don’t deceive yourself with any false hopes, Mr. Persé,” she said, with a certain cold hauteur, which only served to make her more charming in the eyes of her infatuated lover.

“We shall see, we shall see,” said he, nodding his head emphatically several times. Then “Few girls in New York, I imagine would require to be taught to accept the son of Newbold Persé. He is not considered an altogether bad match. But I like you not one jot the less for it, ’pon my life I

don't. I like the pluck and spirit you show. We shall be all the happier and appreciate each other all the better for not having everything go too smoothly at first. And now goodbye—think of me, the oftener the better, as I shall of you," and with a look that was meant to be tender and full of meaning, but which only served to accentuate the close-setting of his little eyes, he departed.

### XIII.

#### AN AWAKENING.

Nora drew a great breath of relief, as the door closed behind Earle's retreating figure.

"How unutterably stupid of him to propose! I never for a moment encouraged him. And what unfathomable depths of self-confidence the man has to imagine that he has it in his power to teach me to love him! Good Heavens! Such a man as that! And the impertinence of asking if I loved anyone else! How thankful I am that I was able to say truthfully that I was fancy free. Such a man as that is not the ideal of my dreams. No!—But what *is* my ideal?"

Nora's heart gave a sudden leap and the blood rushed to her face with a force that made her, for an instant no longer than an electric flash, feel dazed.

"Am I fancy free? *Can* I honestly say so?" And behind that closed drawing-room door beyond which Earle Persé, not a bit depressed by the interview just ended, was struggling into goloshes and overcoat, Nora stood with her red face buried in her hands, face to face for the first time with the—to her,

overpowering fact that she never again could say with truth and sincerity that she was fancy free.

She had been so busy, so pre-occupied every waking moment of the day for the past two months, that she had not realized that her heart was being slowly won away from her, until at this sudden moment of awakening she found it was no longer her own. The discovery was a positive shock to her.

Nora was not given usually to studying her own feelings; she had really never loved anyone before in her life; had never even played at doing so—or flirted, as the word goes—and now that the revelation had come upon her, it was as much a pain as a pleasure.

Hers was a nature to take impressions slowly, but very seriously. This love had been slow of growth, but its roots had struck deep, and as she turned and walked away to a distant window to think out her position for a moment and face herself squarely, she realized that it was already a great fact in her life, one with which, from this time forth, she would have to reckon.

She was half ashamed to find how completely Paul King had won her heart away from her keeping, he never having asked her for it. But how could it be otherwise? Was he not the best, the worthiest, the noblest of men? Did he not stand alone among the many with whom she had associated thus far? Had she not seen as long ago as the New Year house-party that he was different from his fellows? Had she not even then felt a certain kin-

ship with him, a sincere liking, the depth and meaning of which she had not dreamed? How this had been increased and cultivated by their almost daily meetings since then! How happy she had been through it all, not questioning anything—taking it for granted that it was possible to associate with him as with dear old Jack, and have the sincerest feeling of good-fellowship and enjoyment of the society of one, as of the other, without *arrière-pensée*.

Of course it was, without doubt, perfectly natural that she should have become attached to him—nay, acknowledge it to yourself courageously, poor Nora—that she should love him with all the capacity for loving that in her lay. Now that she looked back, she saw that, had the case been that of any other girl, she would have foretold this same outcome—and what would be the conclusion?

He had never made love to her, certainly, but he had been so kind, so comprehending, so sympathetic in all her thoughts, ideas, aspirations—could it not be that he, too, cared for her, be it ever so little?

How should she ever face him again without betraying some trace of the secret she had learned about herself this day? How not look into his face in the hope of catching some evidence that he was not quite without feeling for her? It would be too humiliating to have to believe that she had given her heart unsought, unasked!

Nora did not realize how long a time had elapsed since the house-door had closed on the departing Persé, when she once more came back to herself at

the point where she had dismissed him. She stopped a moment to regain her composure, then went again upstairs to the Growlery.

She was not, however, as perfectly composed-looking as she flattered herself, her color and the brightness of her eyes giving her face a heightened beauty beyond what was usual to it, lovely as it was.

When she came in, Lilian was sitting, novel in hand, and Jack, with his hands in his pockets, was wandering up and down the room, avowedly waiting for tea, though in reality quite as curious as Lilian to know something of Persé's short visit.

"He didn't stay long—we heard the door close some time ago," they had said to each other, failing to account for Nora's delay in coming back.

"Well!" exclaimed Lilian, throwing down her book and jumping up excitedly. "Did he propose, and when is it to come off?"

"What to come off? What perfect rubbish, Lilian! If you mean, am I going to marry Earle Persé, no. You will have me on your hands for many a long day yet. I do believe you have filled your dear, curly little head so brimful of novels that you see romances at every turn. Come, boys and girls, let us have our consoling cup of tea, this cheerless, snowy day." Nora rattled on, hoping to turn Lilian's mind away from the unpleasant topic, but without success, for suddenly, to the utter amazement of both Nora and Jack, Lilian, flushed and angry, sprang from her seat.

"What possesses you, you foolish girl? Isn't the

best match in New York good enough for you? You treat me like a baby and try to dodge my question by talking nonsense, but you can't blind my eyes. I know just as well as if you had told me—secretive woman that you are!" and she flung herself out of the room, leaving Jack and Nora looking at one another in blank wonder.

"She's disappointed. You have no idea how her little heart has been set on seeing you make a grand match with Persé," said Jack, by way of trying to smooth things down. But used as he was to girls' queer ways, he could not in his own mind understand his little sister.

"I only hope your words are prophetic, Nora dear, and that you will be with us still for many a long day."

Now Nora's heart was very full after the various emotions of the afternoon, and her sweet eyes glistened with unshed tears as she laid her hand on Jack's shoulder.

"Dear Jack," said she, "how good you are to me—always. So kind, so sympathetic! Were you my own real brother, Jack, I couldn't love you better."

Jack said nothing for a moment. Then, laying his hand over Nora's, which still rested on his shoulder, he said in, for him, a quite solemn voice: "Thank you, Nora. Trust your brother always, and know that you have no better friend." Then, as if things were taking too tragic a tone, he turned to the subject of the song he and Lilian had been trying, took his usual cup of tea flavored with talk of the town, and then left to fulfil some engagement.

## XIV.

### CLOUDS GATHER.

It was no doubt due to the fact that Lent came in so late that winter that more than one of the girls' little circle was in danger of becoming blasé with the long and now monotonous succession of entertainments. Whatever the cause, there was unquestionably a distinct sense of want of briskness in the moral atmosphere of the Stanley house.

Lilian's fair visage began to cloud over oftener than of yore, and the sweetness of her temper to show signs, in the bosom of her family, of wear and tear of the nervous system. To do her justice, she had never been of a querulous disposition; never had had nerves. But then, she had never before in her life been crossed or opposed in anything. Now, however, the tax and strain upon her patience were severe.

Constantly Paul came to the house. She had unlimited opportunity of trying to stimulate his interest in her. She was acknowledged by all to be irresistible—and believed it—yet he, the one man whom she *willed* to have love her, remained calmly insensible to her.

She was suffering from the strain of standing on tip-toe, reaching for the moon. Her temper became each day more capricious, more fretful.

Her mother was anxious about her, fearing that she was worn out with the fatigue and excitement of the long season. The good lady sought the family physician and got a tonic for her, but alas! the tonic availed nothing for the unevenness of her daughter's humors.

Nora fared badly at Lilian's hands from the time she refused Earle Persé. She was utterly at a loss to explain Lilian's changed attitude toward her. It was as strange as it was novel, and caused Nora many a moment of puzzled wonder and sadness. Their relations had hitherto been, for the most part, so undisturbed, so peaceful, it distressed her to see that now she evidently annoyed Lilian without being able to discover wherein she was at fault.



## XV.

### PART OF A LETTER TO MRS. MARION LANGFORD, IN PARIS.

—"Where are you now, and what doing? It is with a real desire for information that I ask, for I have dreams which I am longing to realize, and you are a necessary part of them. You will be interested—you dear old sympathetic friend—to hear that my dreams have to do with my old fancy for painting. I have lately tried my hand at likenesses and have (perhaps erroneously) taken it into my head that I could do serious work if only I could study under good masters. There is no possibility of doing anything serious here. We have had socially a delightful and successful winter, no doubt; but you will understand when I tell you that it has not satisfied me. I am perhaps unreasonable, but I do think it is a life one can soon weary of, and that is my danger, notwithstanding the kindness of one and all to me.

My dream is that one of these days I may be given a holiday from it all; that I may join you; that we may live together in some quiet corner of old Paris and study; that I may become such a great painter as to make you proud of your quondam disciple.

My family are all well. Only Lillian shows the wear and tear of the season's work. Her mother is concerned about her, not that she is ill—but you know how little it takes to make Aunt Kate worry about her children," etc., etc.



## XVI.

### UNDERCURRENTS.

It was, however, Guy who, most of all, at that time suffered from the effect of Lilian's moods. He caught the *contre-coup*, poor fellow, and was quite at his wit's ends to understand the meaning of it all.

Lilian was, in spite of hints and warnings, flirting with him in a way that was beginning to arouse comment. He was by turns in the highest Heavens or lowest Hades, as was the way of his impulsive, impressionable nature. He stood to his resolution, however, like a man, although there were moments when some of Lilian's freaks had been more than commonly exasperating, when the temptation to seek temporary exhilaration and comfort was almost beyond his strength to resist.

Poor Guy's weakness was, too, more than a matter of careless, idle self-indulgence: it was ingrained in his very nature, a sad heritage from his forbears. Therefore the manful struggle he was making at this time is almost pathetic in its earnestness and purpose.

To make himself worthy of Lilian's love, that was his one dominating thought, and it had worked such

wonders with him that his old cronies found him but a poor companion.

He was ready to laugh and joke with them to the best of his ability when in the mood; but many a time, when the fun got faster and more furious, and the bottle circulated more frequently, he had been known to get up and leave them all, with scant courtesy and no time wasted in words. To get out of sight and smell of the liquor—away from temptation—to go out into the open air and the night—to leave the vile, treacherous thing behind him! That was his one thought; for Lilian's sake, fighting one passion with another.

She knew he was keeping wonderfully straight, and indeed, although she had but a very, very faint idea of the tremendous power she had to cope with, she really did all she could to influence him to keep away from that which to him was, of all things in the world, most baneful.

But how could a girl, brought up as Lilian had been, out of sight of all the hideous and melancholy facts of real life, understand for a moment what a passion Guy was fighting against, or the horrible domination it was capable of exercising?

So she was pleased with herself for talking to him so wisely and kindly about himself, and pleased with him for yielding her so much power over him.

But this was Lilian's amusement and diversion, while all the time she watched Paul King, waiting for the time when he should respond to her love for him; almost hating him at times for his slowness in

awakening to the realization of her charm and fascination.

Meanwhile, Paul, never realizing fully that Lilian was a responsible, grown-up woman, took her flattering admiration a little as a joke. He did not, for a moment, think her seriously smitten with him; in fact, it would have given him a most unpleasant shock of surprise had the fact been borne in upon his mind.

They were all such a merry, jolly, joking little circle that Paul King, good-naturedly taking them just as they represented themselves, was quite unconscious of the undercurrents.

Of one thing, however, he was not unconscious; but that concerned himself. He knew that at last he had met one who was more to him than the freedom of mountain or valley, of rambling and roaming over the world; one for whom he acknowledged himself quite ready to give up all his old ways of life and "settle down"—(how much that meant to him!)—although he had promised himself, before the New Year, many a day before submitting his neck to the yoke.

But he was inclined to be wary and cautious, quite willing to court his ladye-fair in the true, old-fashioned style, preparing his way, laying siege to Nora's heart.

In his caution he was determined to lessen to the very narrowest limits the risk of a refusal. He had no intention of declaring himself until fairly certain that he had won her heart. Whether or not his system was succeeding, we already know.

Notwithstanding the care and wisdom with which he had thought out and matured his plans, he himself was beginning to be a trifle nervous and impatient, the fear forcing itself upon him that while he was proceeding so cautiously and sagely, some other more hot-headed swain might rush in and carry off his prize.

This state of mind was excessively annoying to himself, for he was a man who had always understood himself thoroughly well, and had, in consequence of his experience of life, acquired a very excellent degree of confidence in his own judgment and ability to accomplish any given end. Here he was positively shilly-shallying, vacillating as to whether he should propose yet or not; whether it was not too soon, or whether perhaps delay might not ruin his chances—and all this upsetting of his usual condition of mind accomplished by a mere chit of a girl, a novice in her first year!

He could have laughed at himself were it not that he was taking his attack of love-sickness hard. Like most of the disorders that come to one in the inevitable course of nature, the older one is the harder it goes with one. And in his case, never before having been really in love, he felt that his very life depended on the outcome. He must succeed, for to conceive of unsuccess and any further happiness here below did not seem possible. He thought, regretfully, that if only he had devoted more time to the study of women's hearts, he might have known much better what tactics to follow to win this particular one.



## XVII.

### THE DARCY BALL.

This was the condition of mind in which Paul King found himself as he stood tying his white cravat, preparatory to going to the final and greatest ball of the season. It was Shrove Tuesday, and this ball was to be a fitting close to a winter of unusual brilliancy for even gay New York. All society had looked forward to the event as the crowning feature of the season.

No dance-worn gowns would do for this function. It must be honored with the freshest and handsomest toilettes. Therefore it was that, as Paul made his bow to the hostess and looked about him, his eye was struck with the beauty and brilliancy of everything and everybody within sight. A beautiful scene in the most perfect house for entertaining in the entire town.

There is nothing like the accident of circumstance for bringing to a decision the mind that has lost itself in the mazes of debating and vacillation. The instant Paul King's eye fell upon Nora that evening and saw how she surpassed her own self in sweetness and loveliness, he knew that the die must be

cast. Come what might, he must know his fate before leaving that house.

Nora, in pure, beautiful white, her only color that of her rosy cheeks, soft grey eyes and golden-brown hair, had about her, (at least to Paul's eyes) a something beyond and above all mere beauty, such that, sober sage as he thought himself, he would gladly, had conventionality permitted, dropped on his knee and kissed the hem of her garment. For to him, as to every man who is worthy the name, there was something in the sense of her exquisite purity and goodness—in the innocence and honesty of her character as it was written on her face, that appealed to all that was best in him.

When he speedily found his way to her side, he was certain that there was an added tinge of red in her cheek, and that her clear eyes sparkled even more brightly than common, as she raised them to his face. Had he known how hard it was for her to raise them and to look at him with as little apparent emotion as though he had been Brown, Jones or Robinson, he would, indeed, have been flattered, and might then and there have said the words that were crowding to his lips.

It was, however, only a moment that she had to give him, and was off again, skimming about like a beautiful white-dove, before he had a chance to do more than squeeze her dainty hand impulsively.

As she had glided away with her partner's arm about her waist, her eyes had chanced to meet his—his that were saying all they could of that which his

tongue would so gladly have spoken. To save her life she could not help dropping her own, while she blushed up to the roots of her pretty, wavy hair. Her heart was so full: surely she could not have read wrong the look she saw in his eyes!

She did not feel the floor under her feet. Partner, music, all ceased to exist for an instant. Oh, if only to know that she had not given her own heart unsought to one who did not love her! Oh, that the love which had might could also have right! And as she looked at him from a distance where she felt that she might without danger of further self-betrayal, she said to herself proudly, that he was indeed the noblest-looking man in the room, and that, if it were to be her fate to love without return, at least, her better judgment told her, she could have chosen no better, no handsomer, no worthier object.

Meanwhile Earle Persé, who was her proud and happy partner, was flattering himself that he, as the best dancer and most desirable partner in the room, was giving Miss Seymour keen satisfaction and gratification by dancing with her. His devotion to Nora was even greater than a month before, when he had first proposed. Ever since that time he had redoubled his attentions, making no secret of his admiration for the charming girl, whom he proposed in the course of time to raise to the peerage, (as it were). He made a secret only of the fact of her first refusal, being quite satisfied in his mind that he must succeed ultimately. Indeed his opinion was shared by all (save one) who knew anything whatsoever about the case.



## XVIII.

### LILIAN IS CONFIDENTIAL.

Lilian, in marvelously delicate pink and white—a fairy fabrication which is quite beyond the descriptive powers of this humble chronicler, was also looking her best that evening. She was, indeed, so exquisitely lovely, and had been told the fact so many times, that she was in a very gay and gracious mood.

Her mood was, as usual, reflected by Guy who, contrary to his old ways, was now becoming quite a society man, and often appeared at the balls where Lilian went, on the chance of a dance or stray bit of talk with her. Or, if not fortunate enough to get either, there remained at least the alternative of standing and watching the idol of his eyes as she amused herself with her partners—an occupation not productive of cheerfulness if carried on for too long at a time. This evening, Lilian had danced with him, smiled at him, been if possible more winning than ever—which was really unnecessary, as she had already won all there was of him to win, poor fellow!

In her gracious mood, the little queen wished all her subjects to bask in the sunshine of her smiles, and, after all, he only fared, more or less, like the



rest of her partners. But he flattered himself, deluded himself with the idea that he was more to her—just because she was so much to him. Absurd reasoning! But what sense can be expected from a man so hopelessly in love?

Look at Paul King. He is ten times the man poor Guy is, yet how unreasonably he is behaving this evening! He is actually looking at Earle Persé with a fold across his brows and an expression about his brown eyes as though, struck by Earle's unceasing attentions, he were jealous. But, however little he may relish another man's attentions to his fair-ladye, Paul has to think of social conventionalities and it crosses his mind that he has not yet made his obeisance to Lilian, whom he has, as we know, always liked well enough in his own way (not hers!).

Lilian has just seated herself for an instant's breathing space. Paul drops into the seat beside her, while her partner is reluctantly bowing himself away.

"Well, at last," she said, turning a smiling and lovely face upon Paul. "I thought you were going to overlook your little friend entirely, this evening"—having accepted some time ago the position which Paul had unconsciously put her in—that of the privileged child. "I suppose you think one ought to save the *bonne-bouche* for the last, that you find me out so late?"

"How did you guess that so cleverly," said he, smiling back at the spoiled and petted little lady. "You see I came late, and you are so surrounded

one has to take one's turn," etc., etc. His brow smoothed out quickly under the influence of her cheerful, sprightly humor.

"What an indefatigable child it is, to be sure! Do you never get wearied with the sameness of it all?"

"Oh, but it is not always the same, by any means," said Lilian, shaking her fluffy, golden curls. "There are high days and low days, and this is a gala. Don't you feel as though there were lots of things in the air, just about to happen? I do. It is so exciting!"

"What a merry little cricket it is, to be sure," said Paul, feeling himself old enough to be Lilian's grandfather, and perhaps all the more easily amused by her for that very reason. "Are you always so merry? I wish I had you for my little sister. It is so nice to have such a cheerful small creature about when one feels doleful."

"Doleful? You? That you never are. Though, *tien*s, when I look at you critically, you *do* look a little doleful. Come, cheer up. You must be cheerful, you know, as I am, and for the self-same reason, which I will confide to you, if you promise not to tell." Lilian lowered her voice to a confidential whisper. "You are such an intimate friend of the family, there is no real reason why I should not—" and she hesitated, "Promise you won't tell anybody?"

Paul, answered, his curiosity mildly aroused by her mysteriousness, nodded his head, expressing that he was all attention.

"You say that you would like to have me for your little sister to amuse you when you are dull—well, you cannot!"

Expecting some great secret, Paul looked at her, half puzzled, half on the point of letting his attention wander off absent-mindedly. Five minutes at a time of Lilian's chatter was about enough.

"No, you can't have me as a sister, because I am to be somebody else's sister. I hope he will be as nice a brother as you would have been!"

Now Paul's attention needs no arousing.

"You mean, little Sphinx that speaketh in riddles, that—"

"Oh dear, how utterly blind and stupid men are! One has to dot the i's and cross the t's for them or they can't understand! Why, haven't you seen what everybody else sees? Are you the only one that does not know what all society is talking about, you too-ingenuous and innocent backwoodsman?"

By this time Paul's attention was strained to the utmost, and he had a horrid feeling, he too, that something was impending, but something too horrible to think or believe.

"And that is—?"

"Why, Nora's engagement to Earle Persé."

He tried not to show how the blow told, but it was hard work—only, she was such a child she would not see—would not understand. It was necessary to say something, but his under-jaw felt stiff, and it took almost a physical effort to speak conventional words.

"Engaged? Really?"

"And why not 'really,' Mr. Unbeliever, when I, the daughter of my house, confide to you the great Stanley secret. And do you know," here Lilian dropped the bantering tone in which she had been talking: "Do you know, it is really nice of me to take it so pleasantly. Jack says he thinks it shows me to be an 'awfully good sort,' for 'twixt you and me, Nora has cut me out. Earle Persé was intended for me, as my august parents would explain to you, if you required to be assured of the facts of the case. But since Nora has been receiving his attentions, I have gracefully withdrawn all my pretensions."

"Since Nora—I mean Miss Seymour has been receiving his attentions? Then it has been going on for some time?"

"Why, of course, you dear, blind mole! Don't tell me you have not seen it. If so, you are the only man in our set who hasn't."

"Are you quite in earnest, Miss Lilian, or is this one of your many little jokes?" asked Paul, trying to smile and speak as usual, though he but half succeeded.

"Jokes? I was never more serious in my life. Don't you see how happy I am this evening? Am I not rejoicing over the prospect of dear Nora's settlement in life? Nora who, poor dear, has hardly enough of her own to dress herself on, will be the richest young married woman in New York, and will have a position that every girl in society is envying

her. Moreover, he is not half a bad fellow, and he is simply madly in love with her."

Paul was silent. He had for an instant forgotten the necessity of playing a part before this innocent young thing.

"You don't seem to believe me yet. Come, give me your arm and I may be more fortunate perhaps in convincing you. Come this way."



## XIX.

### HEROIC MEASURES.

"This way" led to the door of a pretty conservatory that opened off from the quiet drawing-room where they had been sitting. Two minutes before, Earle Persé had passed that way with Nora on his arm. He was talking to her earnestly, she looking away, apparently pre-occupied, one might have thought by her expression, almost annoyed. He had wished to show her the conservatory, and she had acquiesced. She could not drop his arm and leave, could she, no matter how bored she was?

The persistency of Earle's attentions for the past month, since his first proposal, had every day become more and more irksome to Nora. She had tried by every gentle means in her power to convince him of the utter futility of his efforts to win her. But he was blindly confident of his ability to accomplish his end, given time and opportunity.

His confidence in himself and unwillingness to believe Nora's persistent assurance of the impossibility of her ever caring for him, had ended by rasping poor Nora's nerves, and, from kindly indifference, she was rapidly arriving at the point of his being



positively antipathetic to her. The idea of snubbing him rudely or harshly was contrary to her whole gentle nature, but she knew that some heroic treatment must be used to rid her of this exasperatingly faithful swain.

So desperate was she that, foreseeing still another proposal hovering on his lips, she determined to seize the present opportunity of settling the matter, as she hoped, once and for all. So she yielded to him as he led the way to the conservatory.

There, beside a tiny, splashing fountain whose dripping water sounded cool and refreshing after the heat of the ball-room, and under the leaves of the graceful palms and ferns, Earle began again his usual protestations, assurances, arguments, all of which Nora now knew by heart, and was more than weary of.

"Stop one moment—do, please, Mr. Persé," she said, hoping against hope to spare him the mortification which it was not in him to feel. "I have told you it was quite impossible. I never can love you—I never can marry you—"

"But, my dear Nora, all that you have told me before. You don't understand—how can you—that you will learn, my beautiful, my exquisite one"—and with even more ardor than usual he seized Nora's hand and put out his arm as though to clasp her. She, starting back, laid her free hand on his arm, in reality to push him gently from her, at the same time raising her eyes to him with a look of intense feeling.

"Stop—perhaps you will believe it is no use when I tell you that I already love someone else"—

It was Earle's attitude and Nora's look that Paul's eye fell upon as Lilian drew him into the conservatory.

She had acted under the self-same impulse that prompts the gambler to stake his all on the desperate chance of fortune's favor.

Lilian had led her cavalier to the door, a step or two within—then out again.

"You believe me now? It was unkind of you to suspect me of joking on such a serious subject."

Paul's face now looked like that sketch Nora had made at Duke's Lodge, at the New Year—the one Lilian had not liked. She thought of it.

"Thank you, Miss Lilian. Will you sit here?" He looked about, hoping that some one among her many admirers would come and claim Lilian, and so give him his release. But it so happened that, as he was considered a rather important personage in society, it was not the first college-boy who came that way who would have dared to oust him from his (to their minds) privileged place.

"Yes, I think you may thank me, Mr. King," said Lilian, dropping her light tone and speaking with an amount of seriousness that struck even Paul's ear, dulled as his sense was for the moment.

"You think me a child, and you treat me as one; but I have seen and understood more than you imagine—and indeed I would long ago have helped you by holding up a warning finger, but what would have been the result? You would not have be-

lieved me. Like this evening: you had to convince yourself. I am awfully, awfully sorry. I would not have had you suffer for anything in the wide world I could have done to prevent it. But I was helpless, wasn't I?"

Paul looking down at her, met her blue eyes looking up at him full of tears. They arrested his own for a moment; for he not only noticed them, but something in their expression. Dulled as he was by the blow he had received, staggered, miserable, they would have had scant notice but for the horror that came over him that she was going to cry, then and there.

"I feel for you with all my heart and soul," she began.

Paul sprang to his feet, and seized her hand:

"It is awfully kind of you, I am sure," said he.

"But pray don't waste your sympathy on me. You have always been nice to me, little friend. Good night—and good-bye. I am off to-morrow. Think of me sometimes"—and he was gone, leaving Lilian staring in blank amazement.

## XX.

### RECOIL.

As he hastily left the room, Paul almost ran against Guy Moore. He was not yet free. The doorway was crowded, and, as he was a popular man among his fellows, first one then another greeted him and stopped him for a word or two.

It was Clinton van Rhyn who said to him: "Look over there, King. I suppose that is a "go." A girl now-a-days will take any kind of a man so long as he has money-bags;" and Paul, looking, saw Nora coming out from the conservatory with flaming cheeks, her lips tightly pressed together, and a haughty look on her usually calm face. Not at all the type of a happy, affianced bride; but still, she was on Persé's arm, and with him passed on to the ball-room.

"Yes," answered Paul, "I suppose we must admit the irresistible power of money—but he is a cad—and," he added to himself savagely, "it would give me the keenest satisfaction to thrash him."

A wave of rage, disappointment and disgust, such as he did not know himself to be capable of feeling, rushed over him, and he made a push for the door,

having but one strong, definite purpose: to get out of it all, only regretting that he had ever been tempted to take his part in the social world. He felt that he did not belong to it, as he now saw it all. Its standards and his own could never agree. It filled him with the profoundest, bitterest disgust that even so sweet, natural a girl as Nora should be willing to sell herself! It was revolting, and he a fool to expect anything else!

Lilian was for the moment dazed by Paul's abrupt departure. This was not at all as she had planned the matter in her own mind. He was only to be made to see that any idea he might have of winning Nora was quite useless, and then to turn his thoughts to herself. But she had in no way calculated upon encountering so strong a feeling as he showed. In fact, with her nature she was incapable of understanding how deeply-rooted Paul's love for Nora was. It had gone infinitely further than she had calculated upon, and, in her baffled vanity, her anger turned toward the cause of all the trouble—poor Nora. A perfect flood of spite and resentment swept over her as she thought how Nora had robbed her of the only man whose devotion she really craved. She fancied herself deeply, tragically in love, and hated Nora accordingly.

Guy had meanwhile hastened toward Lilian and dropped into the place by her side just vacated by Paul. His face was pale, making the black of his hair all the blacker, and the flashing of his dark eyes all the more striking.

"What has upset you, Lilian," he asked, looking at her with loving sympathy. "Has that man been bothering you? I never saw you look so unhappy."

Lilian turned toward him her blue eyes, whose light was just then like the flash of steel. She saw how excited, how angry Guy was, and with a short, scornful laugh, "Jealous?" asked she.

"No—not necessarily; but ready to kill anyone who would dare annoy you. But what was that man bothering you about?" he persisted.

"That man? He has been making a fool of himself"—Lilian's delicate nostrils quivered and her eyes flashed under the lids she had for an instant dropped. "Take my advice and don't be a fool, too. Come. Take me to the ball-room and dance with me. Don't let us have any more heroics."

Presently Lilian, once more all smiles and sweetness, was floating around again in the willing arms of her slave, whose momentary, intuitive impulse of jealousy she soon quelled.

Nora, meeting Jack at the ball-room door, bowed her dismissal to Earle Persé and took the arm of the former.

She looked nervously, longingly for Paul in every corner of the room, in every doorway, but alas, his face was nowhere to be seen!

"Just take me for five minutes to some quiet, cool place, Jack. My head is in a whirl with all this heat and noise—and still I have hours of it to go through before I can get home!"

Jack looked at his lovely companion whose tone

of weariness contrasted oddly with the freshness and brightness of her appearance. She even held her proud young head higher than usual, and her color was brilliant.

"Your looks belie your tone, fair cousin," said he, straightening himself and walking through the crowd pleasantly conscious of escorting the most attractive girl in the room—and that girl a quasi-sister.

"We are giving them a treat, Nora. They do not often see so fine a pair."

"Speak for yourself, Mr. Conceit. No, I assure you, it is all a fraud. I look festive, whereas in my heart of hearts I wish we were at home by the Growlery fire, sitting over the logs and having a gossip."

Jack gave his companion a sharp glance. She seemed unlike the Nora of every day. Perhaps something troubled her—yet he would not pry into her little secrets. So he asked no questions, but launched off into grotesque accounts of his own experiences of the evening. How he had tried to behave in his most becoming, most conciliating manner to the mamas and dowagers present; how he had, with his usual luck, he vowed, got himself into dancing with the plainest and dowdiest girls in the room; describing the result of his efforts to dance with the most bashful of the "buds," etc., etc. "In fact, my dear, as a collector of curios I have a positive genius," he said—talking nonsense, until Nora's brow cleared and she found herself laughing with him like her usual self.

"How did you guess that the most restful thing

I could have just at this moment was an ice, a glass of champagne and a laugh with you, you dear old Jack! I acknowledge that I dreaded the rest of the evening. Now I am quite ready to wait for Lilian.—Oh! Jack!" Nora's tone again became suddenly troubled. "There comes Earle Persé this way! Please don't leave me, will you?" And Jack needed no further explanation. In fact, he now knew more than Nora imagined she had told, in her impulse.

"It was no hollow offer I made you, Nora, when I told you to count on me for anything, at any time. Here I am, ready to fight for you against all the Persés, and all their money-bags, if necessary, my dear. As a first step, if you have finished, we might make a move," and with Nora on his arm, he left the supper-room, with a passing nod and smile at the persecutor.

Soon both girls were dancing, and Jack was once more taking his pleasure in his own way. This, as he had told Nora, lay to-night among the dowagers, mamas and buds. He failed to add—wall-flowers; failed to say how many of the latter he sent home with a sense of having enjoyed their evening, and with a laugh on their lips over the recollection of some bit of Jack's nonsense.

## XXI.

### JACK READS SIGNS.

Next morning, Nora was up and out at a most unfashionably early hour. She was restless, full of disturbing thoughts.

Still smarting under the mortification of having been obliged to stoop to such a confession as she had made to rid herself of Earle Persé, she was only half convinced that it would prove successful.

But far more disturbing, more mortifying, more incomprehensible, was Paul King's disappearance. What had happened? Was he ill? What could have taken him away so early from the ball? And that look in his eyes as they had met hers! How absurdly, mortifyingly misled she must be if that did not mean that he loved her! Why, their glance was so speaking, so ardent, so full of intense meaning that her own had flinched and fallen before it. Could such eyes deceive, or was she in truth so stupid, so inexperienced, so imaginative, that she had invented the whole thing without any foundation?

What must he have thought of her own silly, tell-tale expression, worthy of a school-girl?

—And then the almost painful pressure of her hand as she left him for the partner who claimed her—

Had it been anyone but Paul she would have attached but small importance to these little signs, putting them down to the flirtatious ways she had seen so much of. But in Paul's case she thought she had noticed particularly (and had liked him all the better for it) that he was not in the least degree flirtatious. On the contrary, it seemed to her that he felt more than he expressed—rather than that he expressed more than he felt.

Nora was profoundly humiliated, and as she walked hastily along, her cheeks burned at the memory of her last few meetings with Paul. Of course, for her self-torture she unconsciously exaggerated the outward expression she had given to her own feelings. The very effort it had required to keep careful watch and guard over herself now turned against her, and the nervous re-action left her full of dread of having, perhaps, made him fear misinterpretation.

Whatever way she looked at the question, it was a source of keen mortification. She must gather herself together with new force and resolution, keeping the closest watch over herself to prevent the smallest recurrence of this self-betrayal.

Arrived at home again, the servant handed her a card—Paul King's! Hastily scribbled on it in pencil: "Sorry to miss you. Called to say goodbye."

Luckily the servant had gone. The drawing-room was always deserted at this hour. She walked in there, stopping by the window, though before her eyes was nothing but a blur of shattered hopes, fears of she knew not what—disappointment, sorrow,—whatever goes to make up the ache of a heart that has given all its love in vain!

The blow was so sudden, so unexpected, that for a moment the beating of her tender, generous heart seemed to stop, her head to turn. And it must all be borne in silence! No human must ever know how she, proud young Nora, had given her heart away unasked, unsought, unvalued. Her hand clutching Paul's card rested on the table, really for support: she was tired, faint, dizzy, and oh! so miserable! Her eyes blinded, her ears deafened with the hard blow she was trying to parry.

That is why she did not hear on the thick, soft carpet a footstep—a light, springy footstep that she was fond of, too, when she heard it on happy afternoons, coming to the Growlery door. Jack had seen her go into the drawing-room, and, full of wondering queries over the card he himself had likewise received, he had followed, to compare notes and impressions. A step or two nearer, and he stopped, looking at her with a strange expression on his own face, she standing like one turned to marble.

Instantly he turned and crept softly away. He had seen it all, the card like the one he had, in her clenched hand; the dropped eye-lids, the misery of her face.

Without the smallest intention of prying, here in less than twelve hours he had surprised two of Nora's secrets. Poor little Nora! They should be safe with him.

It took but an instant for Jack to vanish as silently as he had come, and when Nora gathered herself together a moment later, she turned and went to her room, determined to die rather than betray herself to any living creature.

## XXII.

### JACK TO THE RESCUE.

Coming to the Growlery later in the day, Jack found Lilian with the rare variety of an afternoon without engagements on her hands.

Nora came later, only at the hour for boiling the kettle. She looked tired, and busied herself with her tea-making, leaving the conversation to Jack and Lilian, lending only half an ear to what they said.

It was Lilian's voice that caught her attention presently.

"Do tell me, Jack, have you heard anything more about Paul King's sudden departure? It looks awfully strange—almost as though he had bolted, doesn't it, Nora?"

Nora was too busy with her kettle-lamp to answer. "Perhaps he has been frightened away by someone trying to catch him, eh?"

Lilian darted at Nora from under her drooped lids a malicious glance. Jack caught the look and its direction.

"By Jove," thought he, "the little one is on the trail. What does it mean? The plot thickens." Then to Lilian: "There you are again with your vivid

imagination at work, my child. This time you are all out. You forget that Paul King told us himself that he only allowed himself three months at a time of civilized life; just simply, the three months are up."

"Yes, and more too. Why did he change his usual plans first and then, all of a sudden, bolt? You always stand up for him, Jack. I believe that if you were a woman, you would be over head and ears in love with him."

"Possibly. There are worse fellows. Let him speak for himself. Here is a line he left me. 'So sorry not to see you once more, dear old fellow—' That part you won't care for—just nice things about myself. But here: this is more to the point. 'A fellow I know is off for Japan, a country I have not yet seen. I can't resist. We go viâ Southampton and around by Suez, Steamer Belgravia sails at 2, goodbye!'—That knocks your romantic ideas in the head, my dear. I hated to let the old chap go without seeing him again," added Jack, turning directly to Lilian, and thus bringing himself a little in front of Nora. "As you were all such good friends you may like to know that, as I had a moment, I ran down to wish him a pleasant trip. He was in first-rate form, only declared that if he stayed another month among us all, with our lazy, luxurious ways, he would lay up a stock of gout for a lifetime."

"Certainly not a romantic farewell," said Lilian, yawning and lying back in her easy-chair with her hands idly clasped above her head. "What a pity

that a man of his age should be such a grumpy old prig—preaches like a perfect grandfather. Yet I suppose he is not much over thirty. Born old. Such men are never as interesting as those who have a spice of the devil in them. Imagine the monotony of being tied to a man like that for a lifetime. Don't you agree with me, Nora?"

Lilian seemed determined, this afternoon, upon having all her opinions endorsed by Nora.

"Oh—excuse me, Lilian! I don't think I was half listening. What did you say?"

"It really isn't worth repeating. I had forgotten for the moment that you were one of the goody-goody, sanctimonious kind yourself."

"Nora, isn't your lamp too high?" interrupted Jack. "Shall I blow it out for you? Don't mind using me as a human bellows. I am a general-utility man. So. Nasty things, those lamps. I remember at Mrs. Blank's," etc., etc.—he rattled on, talking on every possible and impossible theme, as long as it was impersonal; conscious of a sense of disturbance in the air; seeing an indefinable shadow between these two girls, always hitherto such a harmonious pair.

Lilian's tone of late had struck him more than once as sharper than it was wont to be. Could it be that she really resented Nora's successful rivalry with Earle Persé?

Jack had read so quickly and clearly Nora's secret troubles that he failed to understand why he should be baffled by Lilian's part in it all.

Nora, bending over her tea-tray behind his back, had blessed him and thanked him in her heart for his report of Paul's plans. Unsatisfactory as it all was, there was some comfort to her sore heart in the knowledge that he was going away well and happy. It was no fault of his that she loved him and was unhappy. She might at least keep in her heart the thought of him cheerfully following his bent; traveling, roaming about the great world. The pain was hers, and, present or absent, he should ever be her one love, and his memory her dearest possession in life.

## XXIII.

### A TORNADO.

A few days later, Lilian was alone in the Growlery when Jack came in. Profiting by the opportunity, he proceeded immediately to acquit his conscience of a duty that had troubled him for some days.

"Lilian, I want to say two words to you while we are alone. Don't you remember that sometime ago I warned you girls against intimacy with Guy Moore? Poor chap, it is not that I want to do him a bad turn, as you hinted at the time. But I find that my warning has gone for nothing. I can't stand by and see my little sister running blindly, headlong into danger and say nothing!"

"I can't conceive what your object is, Jack," said Lilian, bristling up: "Guy is as straight as any fellow in our set. I cannot imagine why you have taken him so *en grippe*."

"But my dear girl, it is not spite on my part. A man doesn't lightly speak against another fellow, so believe me, I have good reasons. His attentions to you are so marked and are evidently so agreeable to you, that I fear for you, little sister. Take my advice. Go no further."

"I declare you are as preachy and tiresome as Nora herself. It is positively enough to make me marry him just out of contrariness. Whatever has come over this house of late, I cannot understand. Nora seems to set the tone for you all."

Here the door opened and Nora herself came in.

Lilian turned to her with wrath on her face. "I was just saying, whatever possesses this household now, it is hard to explain, unless it is that you have wormed yourself around every member of the family from Mama down, with your mealy-mouthed, sneaky ways. It is a pity, with all your perfections, that you haven't been clever in the management of your love-affairs. Take my advice: in future avoid love-scenes in conservatories at balls, where any chance passer-by can see and hear. It is too silly.—As for your kindly warning, Master Jack, I see perfectly well where it has come from, and I wish you to know that I am fully able to manage my own affairs."

Lilian, red with rage, turned to leave the room. Nora, mystified, looked from one to the other, afraid to speak for fear of making matters worse, yet galled by Lilian's innuendos, longing to find out how much she had seen and heard. She was pale and red by turns, and her heart beat so that it hurt her. She put out her hand to stop Lilian, to ask further explanation, but Jack checked the movement.

"Let her go, Nora. She must, I suppose, 'dree her weird,' and we must stand aside. I am sorry, my poor Nora, that you should be the scapegoat, but,

you see, you came in just at a most unfortunate moment."

"What does it all mean?" asked Nora, in a choked voice. "I have seen much that I have not had the clue to for some time past. You have seen it, too, Jack. Does it mean that I am in the way? That I had better leave? I cannot make out any other meaning to it all. I have tried to be useful to your mother for all I owe her, thinking it a way of making some return for the goodness of all you dear people to me. But, dear Jack, I don't want to make trouble. I had better go away."

"Go away, Nora," said Jack, seizing both her hands. "You, the personification of all that is true and loyal, go away and turn your dear back on us poor unregenerates? Don't you dare, you naughty child. It is only one of Lilian's freaks. Pay no attention. Put up with it for our sakes. We couldn't do without you, dear—little sister! There. Dry your eyes. It is a new experience to see you cry, and I don't like it. Go to your room. Wash your eyes with cold water,—that is my remedy,—and bury the hatchet."

Nora said nothing, but gave his hand a grateful little pressure as she left the room.



## XXIV.

### NORA TAKES AN IMPORTANT STEP.

That same day Nora wrote again to her old friend, Marion Langford.

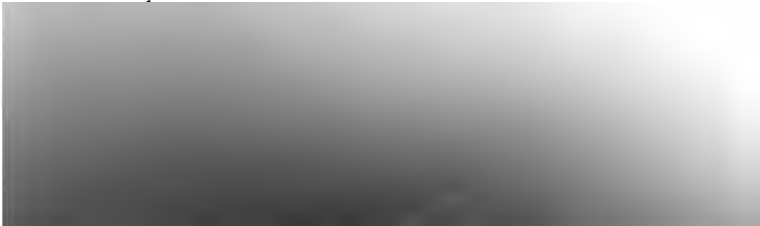
The latter had been her instructress in the old days before her adoption by Major Stanley, and ever since her one intimate woman-friend.

Mrs. Langford, early left a widow, dependent for her living to a great extent upon her own efforts, had drifted, through a chain of circumstances, over to Paris, and there had occupations and interests which made it advisable to reside.

Nora wrote: "Knowing better than anyone just what my own income is, and how I am situated, would you take me in? Could I live on what I have? I am now convinced that it would be better for me, at least for a time, to go away from here. I am a discordant element. I long selfishly for the comfort of being with you. Let me know what you think as quickly as you can, for I shall say nothing here until I know my fate from you."

In due course came a reply from Marion Langford, of which the following is an extract:

"—As for means, of course I can manage to make



you live on what you have, but bid a fond adieu to many of your past luxuries, which may by now have slipped into the place of necessities of life. So think well before you make the break.

"You can have a fairly comfortable roof over your head, plenty of plain, wholesome food, a limited variety of clothing. But trams and 'buses will have to take the place of your carriage and pair—a fiacre an occasional treat. No more elegant dinners, operas, balls—and why? Because you can't afford the necessary toilettes. That in itself will be more of a trial than you perhaps realize. But, again, think over the *worst* side of it all before you take the step.

"To get anything like proper teaching, you will have to lead a life of strict self-denial. But for the rest, my heart and home, are, as you know, open to you. No need to tell you that.

"However, what possesses a girl living in the lap of luxury to deliberately contemplate stepping out of the whole thing, to take up a life of hard work and self-denial? Honestly speaking, it strikes me as one of the wild freaks of youthful fancy. I myself have had so many of the real rubs and struggles of life, that, from my point of view, it is inconceivable that you should not gladly 'let well-enough alone.' Still, you know your own affairs best. If I say any more, it will look as if I didn't want you, and that, little girl of my heart, would be the falsest thing in the world, etc., etc."

When Nora read this letter, it only served to confirm her more strongly than ever in her purpose. The

sacrifices Marion Langford thought so great, she looked upon as not worth a second thought. She was smarting under Lilian's capricious and unkind treatment, unhappy beyond expression in her separation from Paul, and had but one thought, one idea, to get away from her surroundings and lose herself in work and effort.

She went to her Uncle and Aunt and formally laid her project before them, asking for a holiday in which at least to find out whether or not her talent for painting was sufficient to warrant her devoting herself to it.

Naturally, both were taken aback at such a suggestion, failing, like Marion Langford, to understand that Nora should not be quite contented with her lot. Finally, however, seeing how eager and earnest she was, they consented to a few months' leave-of-absence, being quite convinced at heart that she would be glad enough to return to her present life. The time for her departure could not be definitely fixed; but at least she might look forward to her liberty with a hopeful heart.

A CHANGE OF PROGRAMME.

The Persé carriage, perfect beyond criticism in all its appointments, stopped before the Stanley door.

Mrs. Stanley being pronounced to be visible, Madam Persé, with the aid of her footman, descended. She had a truly noble air about her, with her velvet and sables setting off so well her white hair à la Pompadour.

The usual compliments having been exchanged between the two mothers, Madam Persé, glancing toward the drawing-room door to assure herself that it was closed, said:

"So, dear Mrs. Stanley, we are apparently to be disappointed in the wish of our hearts, to see our dear children united. It is evident beyond a doubt that your Lilian does not favor my Earle. I know you regret it as I do"—

Mrs. Stanley signified her complete endorsement of all Madam Persé's sentiments.

"For the present, at least, it is hopeless. But may we not trust that, as long as both are young and free, we need not despair?"

"Most assuredly: you are quite right. More-

over, my child is so young! Really too young to take upon herself yet the cares and responsibilities of life."

"Yes, that is where I quite agree with you. Too young. She should be kept quite free from all entanglements of the affections. That is just what I wanted to say to you. And I think it my duty, as we are both so agreed in our wishes about the dear children, to point out to you the danger in which your poor child stands of having her feelings worked upon by that man, Guy Moore. Men of that kind have oftentimes a very great power and influence over very young and unworldly-wise girls. He is, as you of course see for yourself, very attentive to our dear Lilian. Do you know his family?"

"No, dear Madam Persé.—I have been absent so much—He was originally from L—, I believe. But as the girls met him at your house, of course I made no further inquiries," and Mrs. Stanley bowed her head graciously, to signify the immense importance she attached to that fact.

"Yes, my dear Mrs. Stanley, you pay me the compliment of accepting him as an acquaintance on my authority, as it were, and for that very reason I feel it my duty to speak to you about him, by the light of subsequent knowledge. It was through Earle that he was invited to our house. He is of good position, fair fortune, *but* I hear that he has not hitherto been very exemplary in his conduct, and it is my duty to warn you. In fact—Come a little closer to me, for one hardly likes to say such things

even with closed doors—I have heard recently of his family that”—Here Madam Persé poured into Mrs. Stanley's ear a bit of information which, as the good lady listened, had the effect of giving her a curiously-conscious sensation about the roots of her hair.

Knowing how often Guy came to the house, it filled her with a grievous terror of possibilities. When she thought how much more, besides, her daughter might be seeing him at other people's houses, she was indeed aghast.

“Are you quite sure, dear Madam Persé—You must be, or you would not tell me. Oh dear! How shockingly undesirable, even as an acquaintance! And to think that he has been admitted on terms of intimacy! How can I thank you enough, dear Madam Persé, for your timely warning? Rest assured I shall act on what you have told me. It shall not be for any lack of effort or good will on my part if I do not succeed in keeping my dear girl free in her affections until such time as we may see our precious children safely united.”

That night, Mrs. Stanley having thought over the danger of the situation and decided what was to be done, broached the subject to her husband.

The more she thought over the past three months, the more she realized the intimacy that had grown up between Lilian and Guy. She saw the great danger there was that the girl's affections might already have been stolen by that black-sheep, and the more she realized the necessity for prompt and determined

action to save her child from so undesirable a marriage.

"My dear," she said to her husband, summing up the situation, "it is most dangerous to the peace of mind of all concerned, and perhaps calamitous to the happiness of our only daughter. We must close up this establishment and return to Europe immediately. There is no time to be lost."

The Major groaned audibly. He was nowhere so happy as in his own American surroundings, and among them all, nowhere happier than in his club among his ancient friends and familiars, with whom the amiable old Major was very popular.

"I am sorry, my dear," pursued his fond spouse, "but I judge it to be absolutely imperative to break this thing up while there is yet time."

The Major knew this tone, and as usual, yielded, knowing of old that his wife was very often right, and in any case, of adamant firmness (at least with him) in adhering to her own judgment, once fully determined.

Thus it came about that the family were informed in the course of a day or two that "Papa had decided" to give the girls a taste of the London season, and that they would sail in April, in time to rest a little before beginning a new series of social festivities.

## XXVI.

### DEEP WATER.

Nora was much surprised at the sudden change of programme and, in her heart, relieved at the prospect of anything which would relax the existing tension of the situation.

Lilian was so openly and frankly delighted that her fond mama drew a long breath of relief, feeling that she was still in time to save her daughter's affections from the wiles of the enemy. Little did she dream that the cause of Lilian's frank delight lay in the fact that she was beginning to feel herself drifting into very deep water with her adoring swain. It was getting to be a difficult matter to hold him to the position she had settled upon in her mind that he should occupy as her devoted and humble slave. He was beginning to insist upon some definite answer to his urgent pleadings to her to be his wife.

She was so used to his homage and the flattery of his love that she did not want to quarrel with and dismiss him. Still, she certainly did not want to marry him. She had quite determined in her own mind at what point to keep him, and was greatly annoyed to find that the situation seemed at times to be slip-

ping beyond her control. By going to Europe and leaving it all behind, she would be saved the decision which she did not choose to come to. So that, once more she was all sunshine and smiles at home, and, even toward Nora herself, was pleased to refrain from any further evidence of animosity than was shown by occasional little thrusts and innuendos.

During the weeks that intervened before their sailing, Lilian displayed an amount of tact that would have done honor to an experienced diplomatist, in trying to avoid seeing any more of Guy than she could help. She had immense resource in the invention of excuses, reasons, subterfuges, and succeeded, far better than could be imagined, in keeping him unsuspecting.

Her greatest ally was his blind and trusting love for her. But even that had its limits. Toward the last week, he became very nervous, restless, and tormented with fear that Lilian did not in truth care for him as he did for her. In his wretchedness he was exacting, captious, uncertain of temper—"Altogether disagreeable," as Lilian described him to herself. She was becoming heartily weary of her flirtation, because its seriousness had driven all the amusement out of it. Moreover, there were moments, fleeting to be sure, when, in his impatience, Guy was almost rough and unkind, and these gave her a chill, unpleasant sensation. She had begun the flirtation out of sheer, idle vanity, had continued it through pique, and now, but for the timely turn of Fortune's wheel and her approaching departure, she feared

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that he would have forced her, in spite of herself, to marry him. It was in Lilian's character to end by actively disliking those who opposed her will, and she was rapidly approaching this condition of mind. But the goal was in sight. Could she but tide over these few days, she would be quite safe out of the sound of his voice, which, poor fellow, was becoming a weariness to her ears; out of reach of the influence he seemed to be gaining over her in spite of herself—an influence which was disquieting and uncomfortable.



## XXVII.

### PLAYING WITH FIRE.

They were to sail the next day. Lilian had managed so well that there had been fewer and fewer opportunities for conversation, tête-à-tête.

It was quite conventionally correct that Guy should call to bid her goodbye. That she could neither help nor resent. There were several people in the drawing-room at the same moment, so that there was but little opportunity for more than the most commonplace talk.

Lilian's keen eye detected something different about him. His black eyes, not as kindly as of yore; his whole expression repellant rather than conciliating.

He was as determined to speak as she was that he should not.

At last, in a moment when the attention of the others was diverted by a new arrival, Guy said to Lilian:

"You have promised me a definite answer, Lilian, before to-morrow. Will you, or will you not marry me? I want to see my ring on your finger before you leave here; I want your promise that on your



return you will really be my wife. The parting, Heaven knows, is hard enough; but that hope will help me to live through the time, Lilian. Oh, Lilian! I have sometimes wondered lately if you have any idea how much you are to me; whether you have the dimmest idea of all you have made me suffer, especially lately, since every glimpse of your face, every instant near you is a joy beyond words. If I did not love you and trust you so, I could almost believe you had shunned me on purpose. But you tell me you do 'care for me;' say once, Lilian, 'Yes, dear Guy, I love you with all my heart.'"

"What an absurd, foolish boy it is," said Lilian, lightly. "Of course I am very fond of you, dear Guy—else do you think for an instant that I would have given you so much of my precious time and attention this winter? No, Guy; joking apart, I do think you are unkind.—How on earth can you expect a girl as young as I am, and only just out, to marry and settle down right away? Of course I care for you, and I promise you that if we are both of the same mind on my return, I will marry you. There; if that is not committing myself far enough, you are hard to please, Mr. Guy."

"Come over here by the window, away from those people, and let me slip this ring on your dear finger. It will keep me in your thoughts and remind you of your promise. Now, look at me and say just once—just only once, Lilian: 'Guy, I love you,' that I may remember you with those blessed words on your lips."

Lilian, truth to tell, found it no easy task to do as he bid her and not let her blue eyes flinch under the curiously brilliant flash of his black ones. But she said to herself: "Allons: one more noble effort—anything to keep him quiet and get off in peace;" and she did it. She looked him in the face, said: "Guy, I love you;" let him slip the ring on her finger. Then she said to him: "We had better make our adieux here, for to-morrow there will be a crowd to see us off, and there will be no chance of a word."

So they sat down together and talked, rapidly, uncomfortably. He sat, hardly taking his eyes from her face, as though to look enough to feast his memory on for the next six months.

"Now, dear, I must talk to the others or they will be making unpleasant remarks.—Write? Why, of course! You will see that time will go faster than you now imagine, for you are low-spirited. Be brave, dear Guy, as I am.—Courage," and they rejoined the group.

A few moments later Guy, grasping Lilian's hand till she almost cried aloud from pain, left her.

She quietly slipped off the beautiful ring he had just put on her finger, and put it in her pocket—"to avoid comment," she said to herself.

## XXVIII.

### A STAGGERING SUPRISE.

The next morning was full of bustle and excitement, agreeable enough, for various reasons, to all except the poor old Major, whose regret was pathetic over leaving the home he was so fond of.

Crowds of friends were at the steamer to see the Stanleys off. There were the usual flowers galore, and baskets of fruit as well.

Guy was there with the crowd, quite quiet and undemonstrative,—“behaving really so well, I am pleased with you,” Lilian said to him, archly.

Presently the bell rang; adieux were said on all sides, more or less affectionate as the case might be. The crowd of friends left. The gang-plank was withdrawn, the ropes cast off. The usual moment came, intense for many, because so full of hopes, fears, possibilities.

In that crowd, no one heart tripped at that moment to lighter measure than did that of Lilian Stanley. It was the moment for which she had lived, these weeks past.

Turning, finally, away from the railing for an in-

stant, a sudden cold chill passed over Lilian, for there, behind the crowd on deck, stood Guy Moore.

To slip through the crowd, sign to Guy to follow her behind the deck-saloon, was the work of an instant. Once out of sight of the people, Lilian stopped, and with a catch in her breath which showed how painfully hard her heart was beating from the surprise of seeing him, she said:

"Dear me, Guy, you did not get off before the plank was drawn? What are you going to do?"

"Stay," said he, looking at her with eyes that fairly blazed with excitement and the joy of seeing her.

"How, stay? There is still the pilot-boat. You can get back on that."

"I did not *miss* my chance of getting off, my darling. I am here to stay."

"Oh, but, Guy dear, what sudden notion possesses you to do such a thing? Yesterday you bid me good-bye, and you certainly did not intend to come. What is the matter?" Lilian could have wrung her hands in distress, had she dared show her true feeling.

"That is just it, Lilian dear. When I bade you good-bye and left you, I found that I simply could not let you go away from me. Are you not even a little bit glad, too, to feel that the parting need not come for a few days yet—my darling?"

"Of course, Guy—But you don't understand. This puts me in a horrible position with my family. They all disapprove so. They *must not* know that there is anything serious between us. Oh! Guy, Guy!

you are doing such an unwise thing! *Do go back with the pilot!*"

"My darling, don't worry. I will make it all right with your people. Once they understand, they will make no objection."

"But, dear Guy, you don't know what I have already suffered about you. Do, do go back and leave me to try and smooth things down and bring them around to the idea by the time we come home. For my sake, dear, and the love you have for me!"

"I can't—I can't," said Guy, in a choked voice, seizing her two hands in his, which, even through her gloves, felt hot and feverish. "I will confess the truth—I can't. These last few days, the idea of being parted from you seemed like facing death—Yesterday, when I left you, the feeling got worse and worse until it seemed as if I was possessed by a crowd of black devils that pressed me down, down, into such a fit of melancholy that—well, that I had reason to see that the sight of your own dear face was all that could save me. I made up my mind to take my one chance, and here I am! Don't be hard on me, my darling, my love! I will do everything in the world to make your position less trying. I will be most careful not to attract attention by my devotion—It will be enough just to look at you. Oh Lilian! You don't realize it, poor little innocent lamb! but you are my guardian angel. It is only *you* who can keep the black devils at bay!"

By this time, the tears were rolling down Guy's cheeks quite unnoticed by him.

As Lilian listened and looked, a feeling of scorn and disgust arose in her, as well as that shrinking, half of fear, that had come over her more than once of late.

"You positively refuse, for my sake, to spare me this most trying position?" she asked.

"I have told you, my darling, I *can't*. There is something stronger than my will which holds me—Stay I must, or Heaven knows what will become of me!"

"Then remember this, Guy: the position is of your own creating. You have not done me the honor of consulting me or my judgment in the matter, and you must be content to abide by the consequences." She turned on her heel and left him, walking down toward the stern of the ship, to give herself time to recover herself by taking the longest way around before rejoining her family.

Now Lilian had in desperation tried to influence Guy by representations of the disapproval of her family, whereas it was, in truth, Jack alone who had ever spoken to her on the subject. Mrs. Stanley, having more confidence in actions than in words, had feared that, by speaking on the subject, she might suggest the very fancy which it was her ardent desire to keep out of her daughter's mind.

## XXIX.

### CHECKMATED.

By the time Lilian found her mother, the passengers were already dispersing, the city fading in the distance, the steamer almost at the Narrows. She sat down by her family, quite quiet; inwardly thankful to have them to take refuge by.

There was a strong southeasterly breeze blowing, bidding fair to make a rough sea outside. Fort Richmond and Fort Hamilton passed, they were getting into the Lower Bay when Mrs. Stanley proposed a move.

"It is pleasant here," she said; "I thought to stay as long as I could, for the prospect of five or six days' imprisonment is never cheerful;" (she was a sad sailor); "but I had better go and see that things are in comfortable order before we begin to roll."

Approaching the companion-way, she almost collided with none other than Guy. As her eyes fell upon him, the poor lady's jaw dropped, while she received a shock that, for an instant, positively staggered her.

Here was a fine combination! He a fellow pas-

senger! The very man of all others whom she wished to have separated from Lilian by the half of the globe, shut up within the narrow limits of the ship, inevitably and unavoidably there for at least six days! What could be done?

Recovering her self-possession in an instant, she drew herself up with her utmost dignity and gave him a look which was calculated to freeze the ardor of any ordinary swain. But poor Guy was too wretchedly unhappy with the consciousness of having incurred the evident displeasure of his beloved to remark the manner of anyone. In fact, he only noticed Mrs. Stanley because she was Lilian's mother, stepping aside to make way for her, looking, as she expressed it to herself, like the personification of melancholy.

"George, my dear," she said, turning to her husband, whose feelings were the reflex of her own, and who stood transfixed with dismay. "George, give me your arm. Take me below. I am not well." The poor lady spoke truth. She looked white, and almost staggered under the shock of disappointment.

Arrived at her cabin, she carefully closed the door and then opened her mind to the Major.

"Something must be done about this, George, and that quickly, too, for there is not a moment to lose. I have not taken all this trouble and upset all our pleasant home to be checkmated so easily by this man. I want you to go to him and insist upon his leaving this ship by the pilot-boat."

"But, my dear," the Major ventured mildly to in-

interrupt. But Mrs. Stanley was, for her, greatly excited and very angry.

"Now George, don't throw obstacles in the way and waste precious time in argument. Go to that man and tell him plainly that his presence here is positively distasteful to us, and that he will please go."

"My dear, I must interrupt you. You are naturally upset. So am I. But that would be really too—what shall I say?"

"Do not say anything—only go to him. If you have not the spirit and courage to take it upon yourself, then take the message from me. Only for Heaven's sake go—go, do something to get rid of him while there is yet a chance," and the poor lady sat on the edge of the sofa rocking herself to and fro in sheer distress of mind.

Now, although the Major had had nearly thirty years of training in unresisting obedience, in this one instance on record he flatly refused to do his wife's bidding. He represented to her the folly of such a step, which could only serve to put them in a ridiculous light. The man would probably refuse; the ship was unquestionably free to all. It would only make matters worse instead of better.

"Major, you know perfectly well that your heart is better than your head. Do not, I beg of you, waste a moment, but go!"

On his further refusal, the poor lady fell into what was the nearest approach to hysterics that she had ever had in her life, rocking herself to and fro, wringing her hands and bewailing her fate.

"If it were not for what Madam Persé said, it wouldn't matter so much," she kept repeating in her distress.

The Major was sorely troubled to see his wife so disturbed, trying every argument to soothe her—every means short of consenting to a nonsensical mission, the inspiration of which he recognized as due solely to the great shock his usually calm wife had suffered.

Finally, as a last means, he sought Lilian herself. She had witnessed the meeting with Guy and had learned much from her mother's bearing and expression.

"Go down to your mother, child. She is feeling badly. You can best comfort her."

"She was not pleased at seeing Mr. Moore on board, was she? Not more so than I was, dear Papa. We are quite of one mind, if that can be any comfort to her."

"Go—go tell her so. I have never seen your mother so upset."

Lilian went below.

"Will he not go away with the pilot?" asked the poor lady, harking back to her one hope of salvation.

"That, no power on earth will make him do. He told me so himself. It is, I assure you, dear little motherkin, just as unpleasant to me as to you. But you must not give it another thought, as we are all of the same mind," etc.

Lilian's evident sincerity served to calm and re-

assure Mrs. Stanley more than all the Major's arguments.

"Only, dear child, you must promise me that you will give him the cold shoulder. Remember, I forbid you formally to continue his acquaintance. I forbid you to know him."

"Just as you say, Mama dear," Lilian acquiesced, kissing her mother tenderly, caressingly.

Now Mrs. Stanley loved her daughter as the apple of her eye—even more than she loved Jack—and she soon took heart of grace, soothed by those caresses for which Lilian had a positive genius (when she was so disposed). Mrs. Stanley by degrees recovered that equanimity and strength of mind which it had taken a moral earthquake like the present, to shake.

As the emotion of the shock passed off, she acknowledged in her heart of hearts that she had tried to send the amiable Major on a fool's errand, regretting that, in her desperation, she had committed an error of judgment which might weaken her supremacy.

However, presently the gentle heaving of the ship took her mind into other channels, and she found herself forced to yield herself into the hands of fate. For the time being she, personally, was helpless; but she made one more struggle, the first time she was alone with Jack and Nora, to impress upon each the necessity of standing between Lilian and Guy's unacceptable attentions. In fact, she enjoined upon them to see that she was never without one or other of them near her, unless her father was with her.



### **XXX.**

#### **DANGER SIGNALS.**

Although assured by Mrs. Stanley that Lilian herself was most anxious to further her parents' wishes by every means in her power, and to screen herself from any attempt on Guy's part to attach himself to their party, it was, nevertheless, extremely distasteful to Nora to be made, as it were, a sort of spy upon Lilian's actions.

At table Lilian was relieved to find that Guy was not seated within speaking distance of her, but much further down on the opposite side. Unfortunately, however, not out of reach of his glances, of which, in the days that followed, she was unpleasantly conscious.

Adhering to the strict rules laid down by Mrs. Stanley, he was quite successfully prevented from anything more than an exchange of polite bows and greetings in passing on deck or in the companion-way. But his eyes were, to Lilian, unpleasantly expressive: full of love, of suffering, of reproach, and now and again, of anger. She permitted herself, when her family's attention was otherwise engaged, by a graceful, delicate raising of the shoulders, inclina-



tion of the head in their direction, a helpless little gesture of the hands and a little pucker of the brow, to convey to him their obduracy and her own helplessness. She was in hopes that this much would comfort him and at the same time be no infringement of the rules laid down by Mama—Mama now lying prone below, a prey to the miseries of the deep, borne in a spirit of heroism for her child's sake.

Of course it was perfectly clear to Guy's mind that Lilian's family were one and all in league to keep him away from her; but by her kindly greetings, and later by the glance of the eye with which she accompanied these, he felt himself forgiven, accepting the situation with a certain amount of resignation, in the belief that she could not help herself. He consoled himself by looking at her and feeling the comfort of her dear presence, even though he might not approach her.

This, however, was but poor comfort and not lasting. His searching glance soon discovered that his ring was not on her finger. He reasoned with himself that this was also due to the opposition of her family; but the "black devils," as he expressed his moods of horrible depression, found in all this, material enough to torture him, and in the long, aimless, idle days, not knowing what to do with himself, or where to turn for comfort and encouragement, he found himself most frequently in the smoking-room. It was but natural, for, especially in inclement weather, there was no other place for him!

There, in his depression he was brought, also only

too naturally. face to face with the old temptation whose power had already begun to reassert itself in the days preceding Lilian's departure.

By degrees, he yielded more and more. Jack noticed it, the Major too. In his kindness of heart the latter was grieved. And when he remembered what Madam Persé had told his wife, he acknowledged to himself that the latter had been justified in using every means in her power to keep Guy and Lilian apart. He only regretted that fate had forced upon them the necessity of resorting to such drastic measures.

As the days went by, Guy withdrew more and more from Lilian's sight. There were few people on board that they knew. It was dull. To tell the truth, Lilian was tired to death of Nora's almost unbroken companionship by day and by night. In fact, she was boring herself "to extinction," as she expressed it.

With the flight of time, too, the old habit of counting on Guy's attention and devotion began to re-assert itself. The shrinking, half of fear, the scorn of his weakness of character, were slipping away from her memory. He was unquestionably much more diverting than Nora—or used to be, before he became so stupidly serious.

Nora was made to endure much "chaffing" (as Lilian called it) in those days; but that was too kindly a name for the countless "chaffings," teazings, the little stiletto-thrusts—thrusts which, by a wondrously keen and correct intuition, Lilian made between the

joints of Nora's armour. Innuendos, suggestions, harassing beyond expression because they left her wondering just how much or how little Lilian in reality knew of her heart's secret. It was all so deftly done, and with such clever, witch-like inspiration that poor Nora was worn and weary. The strain upon her devotion to her benefactors was almost beyond her patient endurance.

Jack tried at first to amuse the girls; but Lilian quickly destroyed whatever illusion he might have as to his success, averring that almost any other girl's brother would be more diverting than one's own. This did not in the least disconcert him; but when, in the course of her "chaffings," Lilian went so far as to say things which, of Jack's own knowledge, must have cut to the quick, and he noticed that his presence only served to stimulate Lilian's venom, then Jack kept away as much as the bare fulfilment of his duty allowed.



## XXXI.

### A TERROR AS OF DEATH.

It was about the fourth day out that a little note reached Guy through the deck-steward. Only a few hastily-scrawled lines:

"You do not know what a wretched time I am having under the espionage of my well-meaning family! I can't say a word to you, and am exasperated and unhappy because I see you looking so miserable."

That very same day a young man, whom she had not know before, was introduced to Lilian. The fact of having a new acquaintance to talk to—new worlds to conquer—pleased her so much and so raised her flagging spirits that, without realizing it herself, she was soon laughing as merrily as of old. Her rippling laughter, reaching Guy's ears as he sat in the smoking-room with her dejected little note in his hand, jarred upon him discordantly. He could not understand her. He had thought heretofore that he understood himself well enough, as far as Lilian was concerned, because his part in the matter was so pre-eminently simple. He loved her, worshipped her; was ready, if necessary, to die for her. If only she would help to keep him straight, he was sure he could



sacrifice even IT for her sake. There was nothing complicated about that; it was just simply love. But Lilian? What did it all mean?

That day was a hard one for him. Fate seemed determined to force upon his notice at every turn, by every accident and chance, the fact of Lilian's pleasure in the society of her new acquaintance, and there arose in Guy's heart another element which, with wonderful rapidity, grew to a like strength with his love—now no longer a simple, uncomplicated sentiment.

His brows furrowed deeper and deeper as his memory traveled back over the past few months, bringing to mind in a new light many things that had not struck him at the time. As his mental distress increased, he turned, without even a struggle, to his old enemy. That day, those who had noticed him most in the smoking-room looked askance at him, as he sat with his elbows on the table, his chin resting on his hands, looking into space, thinking, thinking—drinking, drinking. As he thought, a veil seemed lifted from his eyes, and the Lilian he now saw was very different from the Lilian of his blind imagination. Still, he loved her. Oh yes! loved her, perhaps more than ever—madly! But it was a love new and strange—and ugly.

Toward evening he wrote a tiny note to Lilian: "I must have a talk with you. If we are to be parted, at least let me say good-bye. Come on deck this evening when the others go below. Do not deny

me this once. I will give you no further trouble. Come."

When Lilian received this word, she felt a glow of excitement at the idea of the meeting. It was as if the opposition of her family had thrown a hue of romance over her affair with Guy, such as it certainly had not worn to her eyes heretofore. Now that her momentary shrinking from him had passed away, it seemed to her as though there was a faint breath of Romeo-and-Juliet in the air. So that, without a moment's hesitation, she decided to yield to his bidding; only looking about her to arrange her plans in such a way as to "annoy" no one—i. e. : not to be found out.

She must somehow escape the wearisome surveillance of Father, Jack and Nora. This had become a positive irritation to her, having always one or other of them at her elbow. The idea of mischievously slipping between their fingers added a tenfold zest to the tryst.

Poor, dear Mama was so entirely absorbed in her sufferings, that she was quite safe to know nothing—and the fact of knowing nothing, you see, would prevent her worrying—so Lilian reasoned. The root of her thought being very like that of the great crowd: that the wrong of a thing lies in the being found out.

The youth who had been introduced to Lilian that day, served her as the readiest means. To do her justice, she was rarely at a loss in the way of resource.

When late evening came and Nora proposed to go below, the youth was standing by.

"Mr. Druse wants me to take another turn on deck with him, Nora dear. You go down and I will follow in five minutes. She is my dear, sweet duenna, Mr. Druse," said she, turning to him. "You can feel quite safe about me, Nora, for I am sure Mr. Druse will take good care of me. Won't you, Mr. Druse?"

Of course Mr. Druse was only too honored. Nora could not well argue the matter, so, with the repeated assurance that Lilian would follow in five minutes, Nora went below.

Bidding her youthful companion good-night, Lilian did follow, in exactly five minutes—as far as a turn in the companion-way which hid her from the sight of Mr. Druse. There she waited a moment until satisfied that he had departed, then cautiously returned to the deck and went toward the stern, on the look-out for Guy.

He, meanwhile, had been pacing impatiently up and down a limited space which he felt that she must pass if she came.

It was a mild, early-spring night of alternate clouds and moonlight, the moon getting low toward the horizon. At moments it was so dark that rain seemed impending—then a sudden gleam of moonlight: a fitful, capricious, uncertain night.

Nearly everyone—certainly all the female passengers, had gone below. Only a stray man here and there remained on deck for a last smoke before turning in. But in the smoking-room there were evidently many still, under the bright lights. The door

was open, and voices and laughter came out into the silent night. Evidently someone was telling a good story to an appreciative audience. At least this is what struck Lilian as she slipped by, and she was half envious to hear, too, the story that seemed so droll.

Beyond the door, Guy met her. He seized her hand, put his arm around her waist and drew her to him with a half-stifled groan, which told, more than words, what he had suffered during these days of ostracism.

"You poor, dear thing," said Lilian, extricating herself from his rather unnecessarily demonstrative embrace. "I have felt so awfully sorry for you! To prove it, here I am, dear, at the risk of being positively killed by my family, I assure you."

Guy was for the moment utterly absorbed in the ecstasy of having her once more by his side: of hearing once more that dear voice in his ear. What was there in all the wide world beside for him but just that one frail, little, young creature? His very existence, mental and physical, hung upon her. That he had realized more than ever these last few days. He was certain of it, for since she had come, since he had touched her dear hand, had not those horrible devils that all day had driven him almost mad, at last ceased from chattering in his ears?

"Oh, my darling! You don't know what agony of mind I have suffered! Come over here, dear one, sweet one! Let us lean on this rail and watch the lovely moon on the water—the glow of the steamer's

wake—and let me tell you all I have suffered. Let me for once empty out my heart and my troubles at your feet.”

Lilian willingly followed. The sound of Guy's voice, denied her for a longer interval than had occurred for months past, was pleasant to her, and there was a ring of passionate earnestness in what he said, that fairly thrilled her. This was, certainly, a different kind of man from the rest of the crowd.

They leaned on the rail and looked at the moonlight—looked at the phosphorescent gleam of the ship's wake—or she did, for he had eyes only for her face.

“If you only knew, dear one, how, when I am away from you, the black devils close around and oppress me! They make my life an intolerable burden. I acknowledge and confess it to you, my sweet, that they have, yes, even for days before we left home, pursued me with the suggestion that you were false; that you didn't love me; that you were only playing with me! Great Heaven! If that were true, what would become of me!”

“What an absurd dear boy it is, to let his mind run on such things! And rather unkind to me, dear Guy, I must say, for you have no ground at all for thinking such things about me.”

“I don't know, I don't know. All I do know for certain is that I love you above all created things; that I look on you as my guardian angel; that when I have not the comfort and support of your dear presence and your voice, I am utterly help-

less and hopeless. The devils' voices chatter in my ears until my brain grows dizzy. I put my fingers in my ears to shut them out, and still they go on—and always about you, dear one!—'She is false, she is false!' I can't get rid of it. Heaven help me!—there it begins again!"

Guy seized Lilian's arm, a look of helpless terror coming over his face.

Lilian remembered what she had heard of Guy; her heart sank, for she feared he had again been drinking.

"Come, come, dear," she said, in rather a feeble voice; "Don't let yourself be cast down like that. You are miserable and unhappy in consequence of these unfortunate days. It was too bad that you were forced into such a position, dear; but in future, I declare you shall not be made so unhappy. There dear," and she strove to pacify him as one would a tired, sick child. We have said that Lilian had a genius for caressing and comforting. She now tried what she could do with Guy by soft, sweet words and soothing touch—meanwhile glancing over her shoulder at the lonely, deserted deck, now in darkest night, now lit by fleeting, ever-lessening moonlight.

She already asked herself if she had been wise to come, and was quite certain that it would have been pleasanter to have stayed away. She hated scenes, and Guy could be so tiresomely tragical!

"Where is my ring?" asked he suddenly, almost roughly, bending on her so stern a look that love seemed to have suddenly vanished,

## XXXII.

### WRECKED.

A sudden, sharp blow fell on the hand with which Guy clutched Lilian's fair white arm cruelly hard. He was so taken aback that his fingers unconsciously relaxed, while Nora quietly pushed herself between the two.

"Take your hand off my sister's arm," she commanded in a low, intense voice.

His jaw dropped; he stepped back as though he had had cold water thrown in his face, so sudden and unexpected was Nora's action. She looked to him like an avenging spirit, standing there so tall, so slim and pale in the feeble moonlight.

Lilian flung her arms madly around Nora's neck. "Save me, save me!" she cried, and then her head dropped heavily; she fainted.

"Quick, Mr. Moore! Some brandy from the smoking-room—Lilian has fainted."

Guy looked dully, blankly at them both. "Brandy—brandy," he murmured stupidly, like one waked out of a sleep.

"Yes, yes—quickly—go." Nora's only thought was to get him away, and, for once in her life, she played up to Lilian's acting; for she had good reason, from the almost painful force with which Lilian still

clutched her about the neck, to doubt the genuineness of her faint. But that she was almost mad from fright, Nora could well believe.

Any pretext to get Guy out of sight and hearing, and away from that awful rail! What mad thing might he not be moved to do, and she now a helpless witness!

Guy, still half dazed, turned mechanically to obey, when an arm was slipped quietly through his.

"Come along with me to the smoking-room, Moore. We will see what we can get for my sister;" and Jack very gently, but with irresistible firmness, drew Guy away. "Don't move, Nora, till I return," said Jack over his shoulder, as he led the stunned man away.

Nora tried to lay Lilian down on the deck, for the weight and strain on her neck were almost more than her strength could bear.

"There, dear little sister—You are quite safe now. Jack has taken him away." But Lilian clutched madly at Nora, and then dropped off into a genuine faint.

Nora propped up the fair little head from the hard deck, chafed her hands, spoke to her by every endearing name; but this time little Lilian had really, for the moment, reached the limit of her endurance, and her spirit was far away, out of reach of sound or sense.

It seemed an age of mortal agony of mind before Jack came back. Nora could not move even if she would. Might not Lilian die before relief came? She could not scream or call, for there must

be no excitement or scandal about this evening's occurrence. Jack would surely return when he could. He had ordered her peremptorily to stay where she was. Would this awful time never come to an end!

Now Nora had left Lilian with an uncomfortable sense of not literally fulfilling her aunt's injunctions. She could not well have refused to leave Lilian, and yet, so great had been her feeling of uneasiness that she had stopped at the foot of the steps for several minutes, uncertain as to what she ought to do. Then Mr. Druse had come down alone, had said, smiling: "Your sister is military punctuality itself, Miss Seymour. Five minutes by the watch. Not one more would she stay," and, with a polite good-night, had passed on, while Nora, with a sudden, unaccountable fear, ran up the steps of the companion-way.

Lilian had certainly not come down, for she had not moved from the bottom of the steps. Where could she have gone—alone?

Nora hurried on deck; searched hastily in every corner, wondering, anxious, full of self-reproach for having disobeyed orders. Just as she neared the stern, she heard a faint cry from Lilian. Her heart gave a bound, and she went on faster. When she came upon the two, saw Guy's attitude and heard Lilian's scream, acting with lightning speed on the impulse of the moment, she, as we have seen, so startled and stunned Guy as to be able to get Lilian out of his grasp. Her own heart beat like a sledgehammer against her side. She was cold with the horror of those words which had struck her ear, and the instant vision of the awful thing which it was so easy

—so terribly easy for a man with the strength of frenzy to accomplish, against the resistance of so frail and helpless a girl.

Meanwhile Jack, with gentle but determined force, led Guy back to the smoking-room. The latter tried to say something in explanation or extenuation; but his voice was choked by a dry sob that died away in a groan.

"Don't try to explain matters, Moore," said Jack. "Only remember one thing; no one must ever know one word of this wretched business. You understand me? My sister's name must never pass your lips. That I insist upon. Remember."

Guy hung his head, shaking and groaning. Words seemed quite beyond him. By the time they reached the smoking-room, he, already suffering the reaction from the frenzy of excitement in which he had been, dropped helplessly into a seat, shaking as in an ague-fit, and as pale as death.

Jack called for brandy to take to Lilian, sending the steward instantly in quest of the doctor. When the brandy came, Guy looked up with the eyes of a poor, hunted creature, and found strength to pour himself out some, which he drank off.

The men who were still about, remembering his actions of that day, looked at him and at each other, seeming to wonder what would come next.

As soon as the doctor appeared, Jack handed Guy over to him: "A case for your attention, I fancy, Doctor. Look after him please." Then he picked up the brandy he had prepared for Lilian and hurried back to her side as rapidly as he could.

### XXXIII.

#### JACK'S SECRET.

"Oh Jack! I thought you would never come! Quick, the brandy. She is in a dead faint and I can't do anything with her," Nora moaned in her distress of mind.

"Let me help you—there. It is a mistake to raise the head in such cases. So. Loosen up those strings and pins. Girls always have such lots of them. There, now. See, already she swallows better. Don't lose your grip now, Nora dear."

Nora was making a brave struggle to get over her fright, and longed with positive pain to see Lilian's eyes open once more.

"She won't die, will she Jack?—dear Jack! I can't bear to see her look so dead!"

"You dared more than that a moment ago, Nora. Didn't you know that you ran the risk of turning his wrath against yourself?"

"Oh I know, he looked mad, wild—but one can't stop to weigh consequences. I'm sure you did not. I only did the first thing that came into my head—and I hit so hard I am afraid I hurt this poor thing, too." Nora stooped with yearning tenderness over

Lilian's prostrate form, rubbing, chafing, pouring down the brandy drop by drop, until presently the eye-lids quivered and Lilian looked at them, dazed, inquiringly, then closed her eyes again as if on the verge of another faint.

"There we are, Lilian my girl," said Jack, in his most cheerful tone. "No harm done. You are all safe and sound. You need have no anxiety, no worry about anything. Leave everything to Nora and me. There—feel better now? Want to raise your head? You might try, but better wait another minute or two. Girls, only one word more, and then we will try and forget it all. Never let either of the old people know anything of this business. Hear? It would only make them unhappy. Remember, Lilian, not a word to a human being. I wouldn't have it get to Mrs. Grundy's ears for all the world."

But Lilian needed no caution from Jack! She was presently so far recovered as to be able with his and Nora's assistance to reach her cabin, where Nora soon had her tucked in her berth, sobbing hysterically and clutching at times so violently at Nora's arm or neck as to seriously hinder the latter in her kindly ministrations.

By degrees Nora succeeded in calming her.

As soon as this was accomplished, she slipped out into the passage-way to report progress to Jack, as the latter, assuming throughout an irresistible tone of authority, had bidden her do.

"We must go in and say good-night to the parents, Nora, and make some excuse for Lilian's non-

appearance. Head-ache! Yes, that's it. Women always have a stock of them conveniently on hand. Before we put on the mask, though, Nora, my sister, let me tell you that you are a brick. Excuse the expression, but none other comes quite up to the exigencies of the case. Give me your hand. I wish to do myself the honor of shaking hands with a heroine. Allow me," and Jack kissed Nora's hand with all the grace of a knight of old. "God bless you, Nora dear, for saving my little sister." He moved quickly toward his mother's cabin, with his usual cheerful air, only, as he turned his back to Nora, he blew his nose rather more emphatically than conventionality required.

Mrs. Stanley was naturally concerned and sympathetic about Lilian's bad headache, but both she, good lady, and (consequently) her husband, accepted the excuse quite unsuspiciously.

A feverish, restless night followed for Lilian; one of watching and patient care on the part of Nora. The following day, though calm and better, Lilian could not be induced to leave her berth—nor, indeed, could any argument prevail upon her to do so until the steamer was approaching the journey's end. Moreover, she could hardly allow Nora out of her sight, or, if the latter was forced to go, it must be only at such moments when some other member of the family, to whom she represented herself (not without some semblance of truth) as weak and ill, could replace her.

It was already a day or more since that terrible

night, before Nora managed, while the Major sat with Lilian, unconsciously mounting guard, to speak with Jack. Feeling wearied with the confinement below stairs, she had gone on deck for a breath of fresh air, when Jack joined her in her walk.

"I have wanted so to hear, Jack, how that poor man is getting on. Is he ill? What is it?"

"He is indeed, Nora—and more. It's a sad case. Things have been going from bad to worse with him. You know as well as I do, Nora, what his trouble has been, and the long and the short of it is that he has drunk himself into a very dangerous condition. The Doctor has grave fears, not for his life, but for his brain. It is too horrible and painful to talk to you about. I hate to think of your being forced into such a terrible experience."

"Do tell me, Jack—I have never understood how you got there just at that moment. It was providential, dear, for I don't know that I could have managed both."

"You see, the Funny Man of the smoking-room was telling a good story which I happened to have heard already a great many times, so that I was not paying great attention, but sat by the door, the night being mild, and the room hot and oppressive with all the lights and tobacco smoke. I was quietly smoking my cigarette and looking out at the moon on the sea, when the edge of a woman's skirt crossed my line of vision. I didn't pay much attention, save to think that it was pretty late, and that I had fancied that all the women had gone below. I was only

thinking idly, perhaps half asleep, when another female skirt—a grey one, this time, flitted across my line of vision. ‘By Jove,’ said I to myself, ‘another; and if that is not Nora this time, then I don’t know that nice, grey dress.’ Up I jumped, curious to see what could bring two women—one known to me—on deck at that hour. I followed the grey skirt—and you know the rest.”

“And you don’t know the breath of relief I drew when I saw you! You always seem to turn up just at the right moment, dear old Jack.” Nora looked at him with a tender, gentle little smile on her tired face.

They both relapsed into silence, her mind reverting to that night at the ball when Jack had given her champagne and ices, and had talked kindly, foolish talk to her, while she gathered herself together after her painful interview with Earle Persé in the conservatory. She remembered the heart-hunger she had felt when she had looked about in all the corners of the ball-room for Paul’s face, little realizing that already then she had laid eyes upon him for the last time. She was pale, tired, worn with the shock and consequent strain of the past two days, and her sweet head drooped pathetically. Thoughts and memories of Paul possessed her, and with them came the same old pain. Where was he now? Was he safe and well? What would she not give for the sight of his face, for the sound of his voice!

Jack, too, thought. As he paced the deck in silence, he saw before his mind’s eye that other day



when Nora's face had been as pale as to-day—paler; when he, quite unwittingly, had come in possession of her heart's secret—her love for Paul.

"Nora."

"Yes, Jack."

"I am going to tell you a secret—mind, it is to remain a secret for the present. I am utterly dissatisfied with my life. That fellow, Paul King, is responsible for it."

"You and he are great friends—are you not, Jack?"

"Yes, we are. In fact, I have no more intimate friend among men. To me he is every inch a man—a first-rate fellow." Jack spoke with unusual gravity and seriousness. "He is a man who by his talk sets one's mind working. He has made me tired of the idleness of my life. I long to put some purpose into it. Here have I spent twenty-five years in simple enjoyment of the good things of life. Now my ambition is aroused. I want the next twenty-five years to have something to show for themselves. Collecting curios is a delightful pastime, but one can hardly call it a serious work in life, Nora. I have decided to go into the life-saving business," he added, with a return to his usual tone, and looking at Nora.

"And in what way?" she asked, wondering what was to be the new hobby.

"Remember, not a word of it yet, but I have made up my mind to join that body of men who, I think, have, next to the ministers of religion, the noblest calling on earth." Jack's eyes kindled with en-

thusiasm as he spoke; his voice rang with earnestness. "To save life, to lessen human suffering, to bring comfort and usefulness into people's lives—all that is something *real*. I am going to be a surgeon."

"What, Jack, at your age, to begin to study again!"

"My age, forsooth! One would think I was an antiquity myself! No, miss. I flatter myself that I need be none the worse for my few extra years of experience of the world. No, no, Nora. Other men have begun even later, and have achieved success. And, mark you, I am going to be a great man, so that you will be proud of your old brother Jack. Work I must. The feeling is so strong that I cannot be happy otherwise."

"That I can understand," said Nora.

"Yes, I know you understand. That is why I confide my secret to you. You are going to work in your way, I in mine. Let us see which can achieve the greater success." A pause followed.

"Wish me good luck, Nora dear, and say you think me right to follow the call."

"And it was Mr. King who inspired you with this ambition?"

"Yes and no. That is, he did, quite unconsciously and indirectly. Paul has high ideals and a great love of humanity; but so far his roving life has not led him to undertake any serious work himself. But it was his way of talking that set my own brain working, and you see to what purpose. I did not intend coming to Europe this spring, but two reasons

prevailed, one selfish, the other unselfish. I am not sorry, as matters have turned out. But in the autumn, I go back to serious work. Say you wish me God-speed, Nora."

Nora turned on Jack eyes full of affectionate pride, not unsuggestive of lurking tears. "You dear old Jack! I can't put into words all I do think and wish for you! Perhaps you are right, but it seems strange for you to go to work. You are well off—you have everything in the world you want—"

"Perhaps," said Jack, a trifle curtly. "But even if that were literally true, it would only make me freer not to be obliged to consider my profession as a means of bread and butter. No, Nora. You can't argue me out of the idea, and I am sure that at heart you approve. When I get to be a great man you'll be proud of your brother Jack. But do, please, spare my feelings any further allusion to my great age," Jack finished, once more dropping back into the old bantering tone.

Again they walked up and down in silence, Nora thinking what a curious coincidence it was that Paul King should have unconsciously exercised a direct influence over the lives of both.

"Had we never met him," she mused, "I might have drifted from force of habit into being a society-woman, a queen-bee at best. Jack might have attained the noble reputation of being the best dancer and the most amiable man about town. And now we are both about to enter the ranks of the workers—"

all through Paul King. I wonder what he would say? I can at least fancy his approval of Jack."

"It has been a comfort to talk out my plans with you, Nora," said Jack presently. "That is the advantage of having a friend whom one may permit oneself to bore with one's hobbies."

"I am proud of the title," said Nora with a smile. "How stupid some people are to deny the possible existence of platonic friendship! We surely are an argument in defense of it. Just think, Jack, what a poor, dull place the world would be if such a thing were not possible. Just think!"

"Just think," echoed Jack.



## XXXIV.

### MADAM PERSE'S WARNING.

"Something of this business about Moore is certain to come to mother's ears, Nora," said Jack later on. "She has got to be told something to satisfy her mind. You see, father has already heard comments in the smoking-room on Moore's drinking of late. I think I'll see the Doctor again and make up my little report. I only hope our name won't slip out of Moore's mouth—they say he is utterly irresponsible. That, I confess, has been one of the things that has worried me most. But it will all come out right in the end. Cheer up, Nora. Keep up that fine courage of yours."

The doctor's report proved to be most discouraging. Knowing Jack to be a personal friend of Guy, the doctor told him it would be necessary to telegraph from Queenstown for some one belonging to him to take matters in hand, as, in his opinion, Mr. Moore was mad—completely out of his mind, and he much doubted his ever recovering.

In the course of the day, Mrs. Stanley, as Jack had foreseen, broached the subject.

"Your father tells me that *that* Mr. Moore" ("that" so-and-so, was always a sign of Mrs. Stanley's dislike and disapproval) "is ill. What is the trouble? Do you know? He heard something about the attack having been brought on by drinking. What have you heard about him?"

"I? Oh! yes; I hear too that he is ill. Poor chap! I am afraid it is more than drink!"

"What?" said Mrs. Stanley, starting forward in her chair (she was now sitting up, the journey being nearly at an end).

"The doctor was asking me about telegraphing from Queenstown for some one belonging to him, for *he* thinks him quite mad."

"What?" repeated Mrs. Stanley, her eyes wide with horror. "Mad? Quite off his head? My poor Lilian! What a narrow escape! How well we did to keep her quite away from him! For, listen, Jack, here quite close. Madam Persé told me—but maybe you know it already, you men are so secretive about each other's affairs—Madam Persé warned me that there was insanity in Guy Moore's family. She told me that his father had gone mad from drink and had killed his wife and himself! Now, don't you think I was justified in taking whatever steps I could to protect Lilian? Dear me, Jack, how pale you are. I hope you are not becoming a bad sailor like your poor mother! Go up quickly into the open air, there's a dear boy. Remember, Jack, there is Lady Chalkcliffe who is Mr. Moore's

sister. But go. You look quite shockingly. Take a drop of brandy with a little soda-water"—

So Lord and Lady Chalkcliffe were notified by telegraph from Queenstown. Lord Chalkcliffe met the steamer at Liverpool.

Lilian stubbornly refused to leave her cabin until it was time to go on the tender, and then only when closely veiled.

## XXXV.

### AN INTERLUDE.

It took many weeks for Lilian to recover from the shock of that dreadful night. In fact, it made an impression upon her that never to this day has been quite shaken off. She still sees before her at times, when she is over-fatigued or depressed from any cause, the frightful look on Guy's face; his wild, flashing eyes; feels anew that vice-like grip upon her arm, her almost paralyzed sensation, and, horror of horrors, sees again the gleam of the ship's wake, feeling herself in imagination hurled into that cold, dreary waste of water! While the impression was still fresh and new, it made her so hysterical, so weak and ill, that Nora's entire time and attention were absorbed by her. For the moment, the prospect of being able to leave the Stanleys seemed remote.

Mrs. Stanley had worried about her daughter's health ever since the season had come to a close. "You all thought me unnecessarily anxious about her at the time," she said to her family a little reproachfully; "but a mother's eye cannot be deceived. I saw that she was getting very much run down, and I told you so. Now she is absolutely prostrated."

They, of course, consulted physicians, who ordered complete rest of mind and body. Therefore Mrs. Stanley decided to settle Nora and Lilian in some quiet place with good, bracing air, while she and the Major went to London to choose quarters for the season, and arrange matters for the comfort of all concerned. Brighton was suggested; but at the mere idea of the sea-shore, Lilian almost went into hysterics, so that was, of course, abandoned.

They finally agreed upon Windsor, and there the girls remained, Jack coming constantly to look after them, for a month or six weeks, Lilian resting, Nora wearing herself out with inward longing to get amid new influences and away from old associations. She yearned for the absorbing pre-occupation of her work to take her out of herself, and looked to it, more than to any other earthly help, to comfort her and make her once more take up the burden of life with resignation, at least, if not with content. Her art and her work must fill the place left vacant in her heart.

Ever since the recent shock and subsequent strain upon her, Nora had been, as she expressed it to herself, "weak-minded." The thought of Paul and her love for him seemed to dominate her, if possible, more than at any time since his sudden disappearance. Remarkably free all her life from pains and ailments of the body, she now suffered much in mind, and as the enforced quiet brought back the roses to Lilian's cheeks, Nora, on the contrary was pale, for her, and more worn-looking than was permissible in a girl

of twenty. She was silent and listless—not at all the Nora of old.

As Lilian improved in health, many of the evenings of early May were spent in rowing on the Thames, Jack handling the oars, the girls sitting lazily in the stern. On these occasions, the conversation was almost entirely kept up by Lilian and Jack, Nora sitting with her hand trailing idly in the water, and her thoughts away in a Japan of the imagination.

She disdained herself all the while for her weakness in permitting her mind so to dwell on a man who had never asked her for her love—who would surely value it but little, did he know it was bestowed unasked. The world was for her out of joint, and she suffered great discontent with herself.

So the weeks dragged on until a day came when it was deemed that Lilian might once more return to her old life, and the girls, under Jack's escort, rejoined Major and Mrs. Stanley in the comfortable quarters secured by them for the season.



## XXXVI.

### PART OF A LETTER FROM MRS. LANGFORD IN PARIS.

—“ Since you have been unavoidably delayed so long, dear child, be patient awhile longer and wait for me. I am due in London toward June 1st, having under convoy a young girl who is to be taken from school here and put into the hands of friends in London, en route for America. So if you will only wait, it will simplify matters and we can return together.”

## XXXVII.

### SIR JAMES GLENCOE.

Therefore it happened that, quite without her own choosing, Nora found herself taking part once more in the old round of social pleasures, only with a new setting. With a disgust for her own morbid repinings, she determined to take whatever diversion might come in her way, and forced herself into some show of interest and enjoyment. But she felt like a looker-on, as though already out of it all.

It was at a dinner one evening that she met for the first time Sir James Glencoe. He sat next to her. She had already heard of him quite often from friends in common, and of his charming qualities. This, as is often the case, rather prejudiced her against him than otherwise, making her all the more critical of him. She had no fancy for paragons. But she was forced to acknowledge to herself that he was quite as agreeable as his reputation gave him credit of being.

Already a man past his first youth, he had travelled, had lived much among artists and the cleverest literary men of his day; was a man of social tastes and of great social experience; an agreeable talker—

in fact, one to remember always as having contributed to render Nora's evening very delightful. Finding her interested in art, of some slight, practical experience and unbounded ambition, Sir James took an evident pleasure in talking on the subject with her. He found her intelligent, as well as handsome and charming, and carried away with him the impression of having passed one of the most agreeable evenings in his vast experience.

Son of an English mother and of a Danish father with whose name we are all familiar, Sir James had inherited a good intellect, great geniality of manner and a most agreeable personality. Although no shining light himself in the literary or scientific world, he enjoyed much the advantage of being his father's son. No man of his day was more popular or more sincerely liked.

A widower for some years past, his kind friends had long wished that he would find a second wife for himself and once more open to the world of London society one of its most delightful salons, now closed since his wife's death. To the arguments of his friends on the subject of his re-marriage, he always expressed himself as quite willing—provided he could meet the one woman in all the world who could satisfy his fastidious taste and make him happy. And this evening he went home saying to himself that he thought he had at last found one who would indeed make a fitting head for his house. He wondered what would be his chances of success. He knew perfectly well who and what he was, and though by

no means a vain man, did in no way under-value his personal advantages. He was enough a man of the world to be able to take his own measure and acknowledge his merits as mere facts, without exaggeration of their value, without undue self-conceit.

By the time he had smoked his cigar and settled himself for his night's rest, he had decided within himself that, Miss Nora Seymour being willing, she should be Lady Nora Glencoe.—Nora! Nice name—pretty name! Sweet, gentle, charming girl; and he fell asleep, her name and face following him into his dreams.

Nora met Sir James again once or twice at informal teas, and then, Mrs. Langford appearing in due time, vanished from his horizon. But they had talked together enough for Nora to have imparted some of her plans and hopes to Sir James, who had given her the help of his advice and knowledge of the masters of that branch of art which she had chosen to study, and he knew that, for the present, she was to remain in Paris. He lost her from view with deep regret, for the more he had seen of her, the more had he been confirmed in the conviction that she was the one woman who would complete his life perfectly.

As for Nora, she imagined that she was the richer by the acquisition of a delightful acquaintance—a man worth having as a friend. Meeting him had made her short sojourn in London, and her little dip into society, more agreeable than she had any idea of finding it.



## XXXVIII.

### OLD LINKS BROKEN.

And now, at last, the old chain is broken, good-byes said, tearful on the part of the Stanleys (all but Jack), full of tender gratitude and thanks on the part of Nora. It was not to be a separation for good and all, but only a holiday for Nora to follow her bent, to try her own wings.

"When your wings are tired, dear child," added the good Major, "come back to the nest; remember you are a daughter of our house."

As for Lilian, her parting was so tender, so effusive, that they all feared a return of her late hysterical condition. She clung about Nora's neck whispering broken words of love and gratitude in Nora's ear that touched her, who had at times, as we know, had good reason to doubt the warmth of Lilian's love.

The last member of the family that Nora's eye rested upon as the train glided out of the Charing-Cross Station, was Jack—good old Jack, her dear brother. How good he had been to her through all these months; how unfalteringly true, loyal and kind! A thick veil of tears came at last between

her eyes and his figure still standing on the platform.

He had said: "Good-bye, my sister. We are losing the best part of our home in losing you, dear. It can never be quite the same without you. God bless you, dear." Then, as usual tossing aside his too great gravity, he had added: "This is, after all, only an 'au revoir,' for I shall run over to Paris before I go back to America, and shall hunt you up. What is the address? 8 rue Selviac, did you say? Just off the Luxembourg Gardens? Very well. So then, not good-bye, but 'au revoir;'" and he raised his hat as the train moved off. Then the last link was broken, and when the mist of tears cleared away, the train was already speeding on its way toward the new horizon.

Jack had judiciously tipped the guard, so that they had the carriage to themselves. Nora slipped her arm through that of Mrs. Langford.

"Dear old Marion," said she, "how can I begin to tell you the comfort and joy of being with you once more—this time without any limit of time, without any duty to anyone else hanging over me!"

"You dear, foolish girl—you will tire soon enough of the knock-about life you will have to lead with me, after your bed of roses!"

"You evidently do not know me yet, with all your shrewdness, Marion. Rather independence and contentment of mind, than all the luxuries that anyone could offer me."

"That is just where I do not understand you,

Nora. When I saw you in Paris in September, when you were having your clothes made for that famous *début* that was to dazzle the world, you were full of pleasure at the prospect. You and Lilian were like a pair of young ponies, so full of life and fun. Then, all of a sudden, I get a series of letters from you, full of discontent and grumbling at your fate—as it were. From my point of view, your fate seemed a pleasant enough one. What's the matter? Are you ill, or are you in love? I see no other possible cause."

"How you do go to the bottom of things, Marion! You are perfectly right to find fault with me. If you will believe me, I hardly knew myself for some time what the matter was. Then there came a time when the very sight of me seemed a source of irritation to Lilian, and I thought the best thing for me to do was to go away."

"Lilian? Why, what should make her turn ugly to you?"

"I am sure I cannot say. That's one thing I have never understood. But it was an unquestionable fact, and no matter of my own imagination. Still, I must say in justice to Lilian that all that is now a thing of the past. Of late nothing could be more devoted and affectionate. We parted the best of friends."

"Are you sure you did not roll those pretty eyes of yours too much in her brother's direction? She might have thought him in love with you and not liked it."

"What, Jack?" exclaimed Nora. "How perfectly ridiculous, dear old Marion. Your imagination is running riot. Oh dear, no—a thousand times no! Jack is the dearest, best fellow in the world; but we are simply like brother and sister; and nothing more, I assure you."

"And the other cause that you referred to? Come, Nora; 'open confession is good for the soul;' and better now, on the spot, tell me everything, for your own sake, for you know I am sure to find out sooner or later."

Marion was half laughing, for all her serious words and equally serious intent. She felt that she must understand Nora in order to be able to help her, and was of the kind who prefer to rush in and do on the instant whatever has to be done, especially if there be the slightest element of pain or trouble involved. "If there is anything disagreeable to do, have it over quickly," was one of her theories.

Nora, who had longed for weeks to unburthen her heart to some one older and wiser than herself, mortifying as the confession must be to her self-love, needed little pushing, and by the time the train reached Folkestone, Marion knew about as much of Nora's condition of mind as she did herself, her only reserve having been in what concerned Lilian and that horrible night onboard ship. That she looked upon as not her own affair.

At twenty years of age it is almost an absolute necessity for a girl to have a confidante, and lucky she who finds a trusty one, older and wiser in the

ways of the world than herself. The very telling gave Nora an immense sense of relief, and with her arm through Marion's and her head on that good friend's motherly shoulder, a feeling of comfort, of renewed courage stole over her spirit.

"You will help me to fight it down, won't you, dear old Marion?" she had said, and for all reply Marion had given her arm a squeeze.

"Now you have told me all you know, Nora. Here we are at the boat. I will think it over, and try to see what it all means, and will give you the benefit of my valuable opinion at the earliest opportunity. Meanwhile let us get down our traps, go on board and enjoy the crossing as much as circumstances—that is the swell of the Channel—will permit."

## XXXIX.

### A FRESH START.

After a fairly good crossing, having lunched at Boulogne, Marion and Nora found places in the Paris train where they were practically by themselves. Marion presently took up again the subject of Nora's troubles.

"Do you know what I see in all you have told me?" she began. "It strikes me that precious man you tell me of, is simply another form of flirt, new to you, no doubt, but not at all uncommon in this world."

"But, Marion, I assure you he never flirted with me for a moment. He was, on the contrary, as I told you, the most sincere and honest man you can imagine."

"Or so you think, Nora, and I am sure your convictions are strong. But please remember that you are, after all, only a fledgling; that your experience of the world is very limited. Believe me when I tell you my conviction, that he let himself drift into the affair with you, first because you were a nice, attractive girl, moreover rather a belle; then it may have pleased his vanity to see just how much of your

ladyship's heart he could conquer. Then, when he woke up to question himself as to whether matters were not becoming too serious, he simply took himself off the scene! To me it is all as plain as day. He may not have gone into it with the remotest intention of doing you injustice, but has been simply led on by his own vanity and your pretty face, until he brought himself up suddenly. Probably a man whose independence, from all you tell me of his life, is precious to him; one who has no wish to saddle himself with a wife and the humdrum routine of every-day life. As for his having any idea of the extent of the impression he has made on you, I don't think you need torment yourself about that. If he is the good fellow you say he is, he cannot have imagined that the matter had gone that far for you."

"But, Marion, you don't know what an expression there was in his eyes that last time our glances met. I wonder if he knew then that it was to be the last? I wonder what he read in my own?" Nora covered her face with her hands, mortified anew for the thousandth time by the memory of her imagined self-betrayal.

"What I do know is this, Nora. You have got to brace up and throw this off. Call your proper pride to your assistance. You have, by your own account, given up your heart quite unasked—though my opinion is that he enticed your heart out of you. But that comes to one and the same thing; your heart went. Well, call it back again. It is too good and true a heart to throw away upon the first

man that crosses your path. Shut him out of your life, except as the memory of an episode of mingled pleasure and pain—an experience, we older ones call it. Such go to make up life. But you must not be overcome by them.”

“It all sounds sensible, dear; but you don’t know how unhappy I have been!”

“I do—I see it in your thin cheeks and your pale face; and I am not going to allow my longed-for companion to begin her life with me under any such depressing influences. You have got, once for all, to throw all that behind you as a bit of your old life, and start in with me afresh. Plenty of work, some wholesome play—anyway, much diversion of mind. But we will agree here, you and I, to bury Paul—won’t we?”

Nora looked at her friend, half crying, half smiling, and held out her hand. “We will at least try,” she said.

“By-the-way, your kind old uncle took me aside before leaving, and gave me to understand that they considered this step of yours in the light of a freak. He said their only object was your happiness; that each one must, of course, take that in his own way. That, if you insisted upon making yourself miserable, he must at least insist upon being allowed to add to your little income whatever is necessary for your comfort. Don’t be proud, child, but take gratefully; at least what will pay for proper teaching. I can, as I wrote you, make you live on what you have,

but it won't get you on quickly to the point of earning by your brush."

So, "Uncle Major," as Nora called him, was gratefully permitted to extend his helping hand beyond his threshold, where Nora had thought to have it stop. Many a comfort and many a dainty did Marion provide first and last out of the little fund confided to her.

The apartment in the rue Selviac was tiny, to be sure, but a cosy, comfortable little nest where at every turn one was struck by Marion Langford's taste and ingenuity. All was simple and inexpensive, but nowhere was to be seen any of that ugliness which is, to so many, an inseparable part of economy and small means.

"I have had no servant heretofore. The concierge has done what I required, and I got my meals anywhere and everywhere," Marion explained, as she showed Nora through the new home. "But now that we are two, we will live more like civilized beings. I know a good widow-woman who can turn her hand to anything—this room will do for her. Then here is your own room, you see; quite large enough, and with an excellent light. I suppose you are wondering by what magic power there happens to be this extra room, my dear. It was this way: when I was looking about for a home, I had an acquaintance who had taken a desperate fancy to me—knowing me only socially. She proposed to live with me. She was a sentimentalist, poor soul, and when she came into daily contact with my blunt matter-of-fact-

ness, it so preyed upon her that it drove her to the altar! She married. I wonder if I shall have the same desperate effect upon you?—My room is beyond. Then we come back again to this nut-shell of a dining-room, and, my pride, my drawing-room—a large name for so small a thing!”

Marion loved her gay, cheerful little home, and had spent many otherwise sad and dreary hours in its arrangement and decoration. “All it has wanted, dear, was a companion—a comrade for my heart and soul—and here at last she is. Welcome!”

Such was Nora’s introduction to that new home, and so began that life which, in looking back later, was one of her happiest, most wholesome, delightful experiences.



## XL

### LIFE IN THE RUE SELVIAC.

Marion Langford was, as we already know, a busy woman, with many irons in the fire. She did the work of correspondent for one of the home papers; took girls to travel (this would, for the present, have to be cut out of her programme); did shopping of all sorts and kinds on commission, from a dress at Paquin's or Doucet's, to a picture, marble or bronze from the greatest artists of the day—any and everything. This was her principal business; but she held herself ready, as she expressed it, "to do anything in the world, that was honest, to earn a living." She not only succeeded well, for her cleverness and ability were known to a large circle, but the life had brought her, first and last, in contact with many interesting and agreeable people, among whom, now and again, she had won not only a warm and lasting friend, but even an ardent admirer or two; men who could appreciate the hard struggle she had made, as well as her bright, courageous spirit. Of the artist-world she knew much. In Nora's behalf she set herself to work to find out the best teacher of miniature-painting to be had in Paris, and, with as

little waste of time as was humanly possibly, Nora was soon working with all her might and main; with her whole soul, and every bit of ability she had.

The specimens of her work that Nora had to show made connoisseurs hem-and-ha a little; but her teacher evidently found enough promise in them to make him undertake her training *con amore*. Pupil and teacher working together in such a spirit could not fail to bring out whatever latent talent there was, the results being, in this case, most satisfactory and encouraging.

Jeanne was installed and proved a treasure. One of the old-fashioned french-women of that class which, alas! is growing rarer every day in modern France; bright, intelligent; interested in everything concerning her employers; with a genius for cooking and making something out of nothing. Though she was above medium height, stout and square-built, still she was worth her not inconsiderable weight in gold. She pronounces Nora to be "*jolie comme un coeur*," and "*un ange de douceur*," and forthwith became her devoted slave—reserving always, however, the right to the expression of her own opinion. Like all her ilk, she had to talk to be happy. The happier she was, the more voluble. Marion had known her so long, and had watched her go courageously through so many hard trials, that the kindest feeling reigned between mistress and servant.

Owing to Marion's busy life and varied employments, she was often obliged to absent herself, and

but for Jeanne's help and escort, Nora would many a time have been put to annoyance; her pretty face and undisguisable youth making it not always pleasant to go about alone in the streets of Paris.

In the tiny drawing-room was a little piano, and many an evening-hour was spent in playing and singing. Marion was pleased with the quality of Nora's voice; thought it worth training. The first time she had occasion to write to Major Stanley, she mentioned this, and forthwith came a "birth-day present" to be expended in singing-lessons. This delightful surprise was a source of new interest and occupation to Nora.

Wily Marion had studied so to fill Nora's life with congenial work as to crowd out repining, regrets, introspection. In the increasing brightness of Nora's eyes, in the return of her former pretty color, Marion found all the reward she needed.

Thus the weeks flew by until late July. The weather was undeniably hot; but awnings and open windows, with evenings spent out-of-doors, made it possible to be comparatively comfortable. The position of their apartment, from which could be seen the green, open space of the Luxembourg Gardens, now added much to their comfort.

## XLI.

### SIR JAMES PAYS A FLYING VISIT.

The month was nearly out when, coming in one afternoon, Nora was handed a card by Jeanne, who said that the Monsieur had asked for "*ces dames*," and would call again later. Nora read the card with some surprise and not a little pleasure. Sir James Glencoe! How delightful! He would bring direct news of her people. How good of him to call!

When Marion returned, Nora told the news with much zest. Already nearly two months away from them all! How time was flying; how much there would be to hear!

When Sir James came again later, she gave him a reception so gracious and cordial that he was more than ever charmed—not knowing, of course, to what he, at least in part, owed his welcome.

He was most agreeable; told Nora that he had seen much of her family; had many messages to give, as he had told them he was coming to Paris, and with their permission, would look her up.

"But there is so much to talk about, and to hear of your own experiences, that I must beg of you to do me the honor of dining with me at the restaurant,

and we will then have plenty of time," and he looked from one to the other so imploringly that Marion promptly acquiesced.

"He was so nice, so unaffectedly anxious to have us, my dear. Not a bit of snobbishness about him. Moreover, I *do* so love a good restaurant now and then! I really had not the strength of mind to refuse," she explained to Nora, while they pinned on their hats and made their hasty preparations for the evening.

Their life had been one of such serious, hard (though happy) work these last weeks, that the prospect of this outing was an exhilarating excitement to both.

They were soon bowling over the smooth streets in a victoria.

"Which shall it be, Mrs. Langford? You are an old Parisian. Which is better, Ledoyen or Laurent? It must be in the open air, for it is such a warm evening. On the Champs Elysées it is always diverting. You decide."

Mrs. Langford was in her element, prepared to enjoy every moment of the evening, and frankly acknowledged a personal preference, founded on happy experience, in favor of Laurent. So to Laurent's—that most delightful of restaurants where one finds the nectar and ambrosia of the gods under modern, euphonious French names—they went, and a most perfect evening did they have, not only from a gastronomic, but from a social point of view. Sir James improved (if possible) on acquaintance. He

evidently enjoyed himself immensely; Mrs. Langford not less. If he was agreeable, attentive, full of amusing experiences and stories, she was quick, intelligent, full of animation and appreciation of all the good things of life. Nora enjoyed herself more than she thought herself capable of doing, chiefly in listening to the conversation, which never flagged, never lacked zest and spice.

"He seems much pleased with dear old Marion; how delightful if he should fancy her, and so solve all her troubles for the future," thought Nora.

"What a charming *homme du monde*; what a gentleman, in appearance, manner, style, education, clothes—everything!" Thought Marion. "Just the husband for Nora. He could appreciate so well the very qualities she has!"

He gave much small news of the Stanleys; just such details as would most interest Nora; of Lilian's presentation at Court and great success; the attention and admiration aroused by her delicate blond beauty; of Jack's boating-trip on the Thames; of their many invitations to house-parties in England and Scotland; their doubts about coming to Paris before sailing for America in early October. It was as though he had kept a mental note-book in Nora's interest. To tell the truth, he had gathered up carefully for her entertainment every crumb of information that he could. He was gratified to find his efforts so successful, so appreciated.

By the time the delicious ices and coffee had received attention, it was already quite late. Sir James

proposed the theatre as a finale to their pleasant evening. This, however, Mrs. Langford politely, but firmly declined. So, after further conversation, as they strolled along the gayly-lighted and thronged Champs Elysées, they took a fiacre and returned to the rue Selviac.

"Now, Sir James," said Mrs. Langford, "you must permit us a return of your hospitality. But it will be a step from the sublime to the ridiculous. Lunch with us to-morrow—do."

Nora stared aghast, thinking of their modest ménage. But she did not yet know to the full the resources of either Marion or her powerful aide-de-camp, Jeanne.

Sir James needed no urging, but eagerly accepted the invitation to "picnic." To Nora was deputed the decoration of the table itself, with which she busied herself on her return from her teacher's atelier at noon. A few sou's worth of fresh flowers and greenery, and a rich fund of taste made the table quite a picture predisposing one to be pleased with all that was to follow.

Instead of bustle and excitement, the apartment was in a much quieter state than usual, all Jeanne's energies, including that reserved for her loquacity, being turned in one direction.

At the appointed hour appeared Sir James, bearing an exquisite pot of flowers wrapped in white paper in that manner which, if met with in the wilds of Africa, would transport one instantly back to Paris. He had been to the *Marché aux fleurs* of the

Madeline, and could not resist the temptation. He was as always, in a good humor with himself and all the world, and, luncheon being announced, acknowledged himself to be as hungry as a bear.

"*La meilleure sauce est celle de l'appétit,*' you know," said Marion, "and it will be necessary to make up for deficiencies."

Judged by the light of what followed, this might have looked like a bit of "*pose*." A series of most dainty and delicate dishes, cool things, everything best fitted for a July mid-day meal—all served by Jeanne in person in her snowy frilled cap and immaculate apron, with an expression of beneficent hospitality that made one eat with relish. Viands of the daintiest, wines of the choicest, most appropriate, coolest—what better could the Stanleys themselves have offered their guests, with all the wealth and luxurious appointments of their own home? Nora, proud and pleased, watched with amusement Sir James' frank enjoyment.

As the door closed upon him, when he had taken his reluctant departure amid the friendliest good-byes and promises of a speedy return, Nora said, still with a laugh on her lips: "Really one would almost take him for a boy by the way he enjoys things. He is certainly very pleasant."

"He is indeed," said Marion, emphatically. "I call him charming, myself. He has none of that stiffness one associates with the conventional idea of the Englishman. You remember the old story of the man standing with his back to the fire, who said he

smelt something burning, and the other man (an Englishman) said: 'yes, your coat-tail has been scorching for the last half hour'—I mean that Sir James has not a particle of that type. His foreign blood has served to smooth down the angles."

"See how lovely the plant is that he brought you," said Nora.

"Brought you, rather! Yes. Let us find a place for it here in the window-box. There, Sir James; I am thinking you want to keep your memory green among us.—We must be hospitable and take good care of him." So Marion christened the plant after its donor, and many a smile did she bring to Nora's face when, in hurrying off in the mornings on business, she would call to her: "Don't forget to look after Sir James; be sure to give him plenty to drink"—or some recommendation of the kind. If his object had been that suggested by Marion, he could not have succeeded better. His first visit had made a pleasant stir in the even quiet of their lives. They had frankly enjoyed it, and looked forward to its being repeated some day.

## XLII.

### A BURDEN OF TEARS AND DREAD.

All the world, great and small, unless too hopelessly poor, goes out of Paris, as we all know, in August, so that lessons of all kinds are perforce interrupted. It was hot, muggy, sultry, trying. Marion having much business on hand just at that moment, did not feel free to move to the country; they, therefore, were obliged to content themselves with a few days at a time in some near-by green place, where were at least fresh air and rest.

Lilian was meanwhile proving herself a remarkably faithful correspondent, keeping Nora well posted as to all their comings and goings among the rich and favored of the world; the Stanleys having easily and naturally found their place among the best people. Her descriptions, as the summer advanced, of the charming country-house life, and, later, of the visits to Scotland during shooting-season, were all well-calculated to make Nora repent her choice of life. But it had no such effect. It all read delightfully, and she was glad that the others should be enjoying it; but her present life suited her tastes infinite-

ly better, and September found her quite as determined as ever to abide by her choice.

All through Lilian's report of her gay life and brilliant success ran an undercurrent of mental distress. She was still pursued by memories of that awful night aboardship, and confided to Nora her black terror of some time coming again face to face with Guy. As long as she remained in England, she could never know peace of mind; yet she could give no plausible pretext to her parents for wishing to leave England. She dare not tell them why, for more reasons than that Jack had forbidden her to do so. To pass a season in England, had always been the dream of her ambition. To be presented at Court, well received by the best society, visit at such houses as should make her the envy of ordinary american mortals—all that had been her dream of happiness. Here she was realizing it every day, and yet it was all being spoiled for her by memory and fear. Memory of the past—fear of the future!

"Poor old Jack warned her that she must 'dree her weird'—Even she, apparently, is not to escape," thought Nora; and, notwithstanding the share in Lilian's trials which she herself had perforce been made to suffer, she, with the generosity of her nature, was sorry for the girl, knowing perfectly that no human power could relieve her of her secret burden of anxiety.

As long as Guy and Lilian walked the same earth, she would never be able to shake off her burden of

fears and dreads. What had become of him since she quitted the ship, she knew not; nor whether he was mad or sane. It gave Lilian an uncanny feeling to think of it all; of all the possibilities that lurked in the situation; but she was for once, utterly powerless to change things in the smallest degree. She could but endure in silence—the most difficult task that had ever fallen to her lot.



### XLIII.

#### JACK'S EMBASSY.

September came and had already well-nigh run its course, when one fine day Jack wrote that he would run over and say good-bye before sailing for home. He was to come as ambassador from the family, to try and tempt Nora into consenting to return with them; failing that, to see with his own eyes exactly how she was.

A few days later came Jack himself, handsome as ever, with that pumice-stoned, clean-cut look peculiar to him. He always brought with him into a room a sense of fresh air and cheerful life which acted directly upon those with whom he associated, like a tonic, or an exhilarating, refreshing breeze—perhaps this is what some call “magnetism” for lack of a better name. His summer of association with “High Mightinesses,” as he expressed it, had found and left him the same old Jack.

“Don’t you repent, Nora?” he asked. “Are you not ready to come back to the fold, misguided young lambkin?”

“Do you repent, Jack? Have you abandoned your own plan of work?”



"Not for a moment, my dear. On the contrary, I have made the parents' life a burden to them, trying to get them home in time for me to begin my studies. They don't want to remain for the winter; I don't want to leave them—so we have compromised on October. Next time you see me, Nora, I shall be a full-fledged practitioner—that is if you persist in staying over here."

Jack had plans for a very full day of commissions for Lilian and his mother. Nora was indispensable as an aid in the matter of selecting women's fineries, so that she must don her hat and go with him then and there, Marion being formally invited to dine later on.

Jack was in the gayest mood that even he was capable of, when he started out with Nora, first to select a hat for Lilian. He made merry over the impression they would make together: a couple on their honeymoon trip, beyond the shadow of a doubt, he decided, laughing and chaffing Nora good-naturedly; she joining in the laugh with much of the old merriment which, for the last weeks of her residence with the Stanleys, had seemed to be under total eclipse. Jack often looked at her out of the corner of his eye, his scrutiny of her face appearing to satisfy him thoroughly. He was, under all his jollity, studying critically, prior to deciding for himself whether or not she was doing what was wisest and best for herself.

Félix, Virot, Tuvée; milliner after milliner was visited, whether in a spirit of hyper-criticism, or

whether for the sake of prolonging the business which was evidently affording him unlimited pleasure, is not for us to say. Between shops, Jack emptied his budget of news.

"You don't know how Lilian misses you—in fact, they all do. But somehow it strikes one more in Lilian. I know the poor child has not always been kind, and she must realize it; for she speaks of you in quite a remorseful, penitential tone, and actually tries to imitate some of the virtues she now attributes to you, on the principle of 'Blessings brighten as they take their flight.'"

"Does she seem to have quite recovered her health?"

"Yes and no. She looks well, dances, is bright and amusing, and attracts admirers just as of old. But, I can't explain it—she seems to think more, and marvel of marvels, there are times when her confidence in her own judgment is not absolute. Poor little Lilian, she will never forget that shock as long as she lives"—

Then, again, more shops, with hats to discuss and try on, always making allowances for difference of coloring, of complexion, of style, age, etc., etc. Jack would put his head on one side and make Nora turn around and around, while he criticised, invariably deciding on such things as were essentially in Nora's own style. But Nora made a good stand in Lilian's interest. Once more outside, he would take up again the subject of home news.

"Who turned up this summer but your old flame,

Earle Persé. He is looking well; perhaps a shade stouter, which softens down the otherwise excessive sharpness of his nose. In fact, he is not bad-looking, nor is he a bad fellow; only stupid—but that is no crime. He and Lilian find a good deal of comfort in each other's society, in singing your praises. She, I must say in justice to her, is wonderfully free from petty jealousy."

Then another time: "You remember my old friend Paul King?" (Here quite uncontrollably the hot blood mounted slowly to the very roots of Nora's hair, and as slowly retreated, leaving her paler than she had been). "I get semi-occasional letters from him. He seems satisfied thus far, with his journey around the world—does not regret it. He sees much that interests him;—does not talk of coming home. For all that he is such a poor correspondent, I get his letters more regularly than he does mine, for he moves about so much. I suppose that is unavoidable."

Jack had glanced at Nora out of the corner of his eye; had noticed the sudden red that had overspread her face. "After all these months," he said to himself, "it takes but a word to make the old wound bleed, poor child!" and went on to speak of other things.

"The mother is now provided with a regal bonnet—how funny you did look in that old-lady head-gear! The father will get the latest agony in ties, and plenty of his favorite gloves; Lilian a hundred indispensable inutilities—and poor little Jack? I

think he must be allowed a turn at the antiquity-dealers. You must come with me for five minutes to greet old Bouquier. He would never forgive me. I know I ought to be thinking only of bones and articulations, but I must take just one more look at my old friends!"

It was Nora who ultimately profited by this, for Jack was tempted beyond his powers of resistance by an exquisite old miniature. "Had to buy it, my dear, or the old chap's heart would have been broken. Good old chap—large family and not always the best luck with his children. I have known him since I was a mere shaver. But you must have the miniature for that birthday which is past, for which I gave you nothing."

## XLIV.

### A RED LETTER DAY.

"Now you must be hungry," said Jack toward noon. "You french people must eat at noon, tho' dynasties fall and the world has to stand still meanwhile. So let us have our déjeuner, too. Where shall we go? Not Voisin, Joseph, Paillard; they are all twice-told tales. Such a Parisienne as you are by now must know secrets of good cuisine which it is not vouchsafed to us poor Philistines to know. Lead me whither you will!"

"Dear me, don't put such a responsibility upon me, Jack! I am not Marion; she is versed in all that sort of thing. She knows it all 'like the bottom of her pocket,' as she is fond of quoting. She maintains that that french proverb contains enough to fill a whole volume."

"Well, where does she go when she wants to eat something particularly good?"

"On my birthday she took me where we ate very good things; but it is not in your smart style, Jack."

"That is just what I want. One gets too much of my 'smart style.' I am decidedly of a mind for the birthday restaurant. Its name, please?"

They were soon seated en tête-à-tête at a dainty, snowy table, gravel underfoot and the green trees overhead, in the busiest heart of busy Paris, opposite the great, humming Bourse.

"There are some ladies, of course," Nora had explained; "but it is essentially patronized by brokers and such as have to do with the Bourse."

"That promises well," said Jack. "I have the highest opinion of the gastronomic science of the Frenchman. He has a genius for it; a perfectly true instinct in the matter. If this is the brokers' restaurant, I am quite willing to order with my eyes shut, or take with thanksgiving anything the maître d'hotel may select for me. But you, my dear—what tempts you?" They studied the bill-of-fare together; ordered; ate rapturously, Jack, for all his talk, ordering most carefully, and with a bit of that very "true instinct" which he so generously yielded to the Frenchman.

A happy hour or more was thus passed, both thinking it one of the most delightful experiences of their lives. The feeling of being out on a holiday gave to the whole thing a zest that idlers cannot even guess at.

After déjeuner, they strolled over to the Boulevard; sat, french fashion, at a little table outside of one of the big cafés; drank their coffee and "chasse," watching, meanwhile, the stream of life, so different from that of any other large town in world, pass, pass, pass before them.

Then came a little more shopping for gloves, etc.,

then, later, they hailed a cab and drove to the Bois de Boulogne.

"It wouldn't do, if I were anyone else but your brother—remember that for future guidance, my dear. But I don't count; moreover, everyone that knows you knows me—so that it doesn't really matter. So let us be happy."

They drove out to the Restaurant de la Cascade, sitting there awhile, deeply interested and amused in watching the bridal parties, so many of which come here on their wedding-trip; the class to which they belong never getting further afield on that occasion than the Bois de Boulogne.

At the Restaurant de la Cascade is a glass-enclosed *salle*; there is music; the parties come and here fall in with others, as sociably as possible. All dance and hop about in the happiest way, with faces beaming with the combined effects of happiness, heat and exertion!

Nora had to use her influence to dissuade Jack from offering his own services as partner for some of the little *demoiselles d'honneur*, so catching was the merriment, so responsive his own character.

Then, as time would not stand still, even for all these happy people, Jack drove Nora home "for repairs," as he expressed it.

"You go home and beautify yourself, while I see if I can pick up some theatre-tickets. Then I will come back, and woe to both of you if, meanwhile, you have not selected the best place in all Paris—french Paris, mind you—that is to be found. Only

it must be new to me. I wish to extend my knowledge beyond Joseph and Paillard."

It was while driving home to the rue Selviac from the Bois that Jack had said: "By-the-way, Glencoe must have been to see you. He got your address in July and said he would hunt you up. First-rate fellow, Glencoe. He has been so useful to me, introducing me to many of the profession in high places, and getting me privileges to see hospitals, and many things not open to the general public. By-the-way, they are putting up a statue to his father. England is certainly very appreciative of her clever children—even of her step-children, as he was."

Nora told of Sir James' visit and of the pleasant outing he had given them.

"But you didn't drive with him to the Bois?" Jack's face was an amusing study.

"No, indeed, you absurd man. I hardly know Sir James."

"Not that I have anything but good to say of him," Jack hastened to add; "but, my dear, you must not forget that the proprieties must be observed." Here Jack imitated his mother's look and tone with an apparent earnestness that was irresistibly funny.

"I never before realized how much you look like Aunt Kate," said Nora, laughing with all her heart. "By-the-way, Jack," she said when she had regained her composure, "talking of conventionalities and things, you know you will have to think seriously of marrying and settling down. I shall be very critical of the girl, and know few good enough for you. But

marry you must; for certainly no one wants a bachelor doctor. We women are, perhaps, not always given our due; but we certainly do contribute to give weight and importance to our lords and masters; sometimes, they even shine by reflected light! At all events, if you are really going into the profession seriously, you *must* marry!"

"Oh Nora! What a cruel fate you condemn me to! Am I to give up the five hundred charmers for one? Indeed I shall be an old man before I can possibly decide on any one among them all. Such crowds! All so nice!"

"I can make at least a suggestion, Jack."

"Do," said Jack, with rueful meekness.

"The nicest girl I met at home—and you can perhaps guess the only thing that kept me from becoming really intimate with her—was Mildred Persé. She is a quiet little soul; perhaps a bit overpowered by their social position and responsibilities, which I think she has no taste for. Think of it, Jack. See something of her, and tell me your impression. I like her more than any girl in society."

Jack promised to "prospect" and report. "But give me three years, while I study—do! Then I shall come over here for the hospitals and further studies. That will be soon enough, surely!"

Then it was the cab stopped at the rue Selviac, and Jack left Nora, going to look for theatre-tickets.



## XLV.

### PARTING.

In time Jack returned to the rue Selviac, and after much argument and discussion, they drove to J—'s on the Boulevard.

"I tremble under the responsibility you have put upon me, Mr. Jack," said Marion. "I dare not say this is the best restaurant in Paris, but it is the best in the neighborhood, after cutting out those you already know. For dinner, and with a gentleman, it is quite correct, and the cooking *can* be perfect. Just taste those *coquilles de crevettes*. Do you notice the dainty perfection of the whole thing, and how it appeals to eyes, nose and palate? I call that the composition of a culinary poet."

"I felt I was making no mistake when I was inspired to trust Mrs. Langford's choice. What is the feminine in French for *gourmet*, Nora? That describes Mrs. Langford."

"They only give us the feminine of *gourmand*," said Marion, with a little grimace. "They do not admit the fact, even in the language, that a woman can be a *gourmet*. Yet, with the delicacy and refinement of taste and perception that is conceded to

us, we ought to be quite as good judges as men—only we are foolish. We don't appreciate the importance it is in life, especially when we are young, and ought to be cultivating our tastes in the matter. Look at Nora, for instance. She always puts on a little air of being above any thought of the flesh-pots—too spiritual, too ethereal!"

Jack smiled at Nora with a look expressive of making allowances for the blindness of youth. They chatted on merrily, making a very congenial trio.

After paying due respect to their delicious dinner, Jack produced tickets for the *Comédie Française*, where he had found they were giving a favorite play of his: "*L'Ami des Femmes*."

Nora thought the play even better than the dinner. Marion was torn between conflicting opinions; Jack, equally delighted with both. "The only drawback," he added, "was that the dinner had to be curtailed on account of the play; so I think we had better go and have a bit of supper."

"No, Mr. Stanley; that is my affair," said Marion. "Everything is ordered and waiting for us at home, if you don't mind!"

They, therefore, returned to the rue Selviac, where they found, as Marion had said, a dainty supper of *pâté de foies gras*, and a bottle of champagne in which to drink to Jack's good fortune.

The hours were getting small and late when Jack finally rose to say good-bye. "This has been a red-letter day for me, good friends. I only hope I have not inflicted too much of my society upon you—

but I have been as busy as I could be, storing up memories for the future. This day will be something delightful to look back upon, when I am laboring along, later, with my nose to the grindstone."

Nora was unaffectedly moved at parting from Jack. She was, as it were, casting off her cables—making a break for some time to come with all those who were nearest to her; but, it was, she thought in her heart, all for the best. Loves and messages, more numerous than could possibly be remembered and delivered, then Jack kissed Nora's hand; but she, impulsively throwing her arms around his neck, gave him the same kind of hearty, warm kiss as she had given him when they had been children together. He turned to shake hands with Marion. His eyes were moist, but his lips smiling, and his parting words the same old merry nonsense. And he was gone. It was such a wrench, and left such a blank that Nora for a moment almost regretted that he had come to say good-bye in person.

One of Nora's last words aside to him had been: "Do not forget to think seriously of Mildred."

He had answered with a little grimace, also aside: "Must I? Well, I will."

"I must certainly compliment you on your friends, my dear," said Marion, as Jack departed. "Your Mr. Jack is simply a dear fellow. Will you please tell me why you did not fall in love with him?"

"That is easy enough to understand. Because he has always stood in my eyes in the light of a brother. I do love him dearly. I think him the best man in

the world. I would do anything, make any sacrifice for him that would be for his good; but I am not in love with him. In fact, from my point of view, the very idea is absurd. Moreover"—Nora did not finish her sentence, but for the second time within the past twenty-four hours, the blood mounted slowly to her brow, and as slowly faded away again.

"I know, I know," said Marion hastily, evidently not wishing to follow Nora's thoughts and discuss that other annoying subject. "But that does not at all explain why he is not in love with you. And am I quite sure he is not?"

"That is rubbish and nonsense," said Nora hotly. "You worldly-wise, clever people are sometimes amazingly dull of comprehension. You have decided in your own mind, in company with a lot of others, that platonic friendship is an impossibility; and when you see the proof of the contrary staring you in the face, you will not accept it as a fact! Jack is a dear; we are the best of friends, but thank Heaven, he has had the good sense and good taste never to make love to me. There, dear Marion—let me say good-night before I quarrel with you further." Nora kissed her old friend, who, though momentarily silenced, still looked quite unconvinced.

"Does he know that disturber of the peace, Paul King?" she asked, as Nora turned to leave her.

"Know him? Yes, indeed. He is his most intimate friend. He has the most unbounded admiration for him."

"Does he know anything of what you told me of yourself—"

"Good Heavens, no! You, Marion, are the only human to whom I have ever breathed a word on the subject."

"Then all my theories are blown to atoms. I must for once yield to your platonic-friendship theory, but, I confess, reluctantly.—It has been a happy day, a happy evening. Go to bed and dream of it, dear." Marion stood watching Nora's departing figure, turning many things over in her mind.

So Jack went out of all their lives for many a day, becoming during the interval a happy memory for this little household; a memory kept constantly refreshed by his letters and reports, which were so like himself that his spirit seemed actually present when Nora read them.

## XLVI.

### A SCHEME.

Christmas came and went—that most home-sick of times for all exiles. It brought saddening memories and heart-aches to both; but Marion was not of the kind to allow herself to be crushed by anything as intangible as a memory, and Nora was, by daily contact, becoming more and more like her in the courage and elasticity, which were, too, inherent in her own nature. The two women drew, perhaps, a trifle closer together and leaned, unconsciously; more upon one another during the trying days; but each made merry for the other's sake, with the result that they made of that Christmas, at least, a cheerful memory for the time to come.

Then there were the poor to help and their little children to make happy—though french children do not know our way of celebrating that feast. But the little ones were initiated this time into the pleasures and joys of a true American Christmas, tiny tree and all; poverty and joylessness being sufficient claims for an invitation.

The great day brought Nora from the Major and his wife, a handsome check, the amount to be de-

voted to a trip to the famous picture-galleries of Italy; a gracious acceptance of her choice of career, which looked to Nora as though she could detect Jack's hand in the gift. The interest and advantage to her would be immense, and served as something so delightful to look forward to, that the cold, damp winter, with its hard work and little play, sped by without a murmur of complaint.

Therefore in early March, Marion and Nora started on their journey, having devoted months of argument and discussion to planning their itinerary. To see not too much, and that well, was finally adopted as their watchword, and on this idea they based their plans. Days and even weeks were to be given to what many "do" in hours, or, at most, days.

Jeanne was left in charge in the rue Selviac with orders to report at stated intervals and at given points; dates and bankers' addresses being furnished, as far as it was possible to foresee them. Neither could afford to lose connection with the little home; the unforeseen having ever to be reckoned with.

The only item of news of interest to us, reported in the course of a few short weeks, was a visit "*de la part de monsieur*," who asked much news of "*ces dames*;" enclosed was Sir James' card.

Knowing Jeanne's loquacity, Marion was much amused to imagine the pent-up torrent which must have been poured into Sir James' ear. "I only hope he knows and understands french servants of that type," said she, "or he will think that we harbor a maniac."

Milan, Genoa, Pisa, Siena now lay behind them, and they had already been in Rome a few days when, one morning, at the top of the steps of the Trinità dei Monti, on their way to the Piazza di Spagna, whom should they meet face to face, but Sir James Glencoe! It was really a delightful meeting, for they knew absolutely no one in Rome, not wishing to create social relations which might be hampering and irksome to them as travelers and students. But Sir James was different.

Marion greeted him far more effusively than did Nora, who, though unfeignedly glad to see him, yet held back a little shyly at first. That feeling, however, soon passed away; and in the days that followed, Sir James proved himself such an admirable cicerone, such an excellent connoisseur in art of every kind, so well up in the classics, so familiar with Rome, both ancient and modern, that Marion and Nora confessed to each other that he was the greatest possible help in their sight-seeing. "What should we have done without him?" they asked one another. Through his experience and good management, they were spared endless, useless fatigue in searching out those things most necessary to see, and so, being spared waste of time, they were able to enjoy to the fullest all that they did see.

Those were glorious days in Rome. Every waking moment filled to the brim with intellectual life and activity, and constantly with congenial companionship. Never before had a like experience fallen to Nora's lot; she enjoyed those weeks as she

did not believe herself to be capable of enjoying anything.

Easter came early that year. As soon as it was over, they went down to Naples for a few days; then their plan called for a visit to Florence, for serious study of its glorious galleries. They now realized how absolutely they had taken up Sir James' time, finding, too, how sadly they missed his intelligent pilotings. He had said very little of his own plans and intentions, appearing to be idling about in true holiday humor.

## XLVII.

### A GHOST OUT OF THE PAST.

Arriving in Florence after a few days passed between Perugia and Assisi, Nora found among the letters awaiting them at their banker's, one from Jack which was fateful to her.

Jack's letters were always doubly welcome, for his own dear sake and for the interesting news which he knew, better than anyone, how to select for Nora; always telling her just such details as she most cared to learn. Jack had the rare gift of knowing intuitively what the exiles and absentees most craved; the being kept in touch with home through just those realistic little details which most persons think too insignificant to mention.

"Most charming of your sex"—he began, and Nora could almost hear the sound of his cheerful voice; "It is but right that you should be prepared for the possible shock of Lilian's approaching marriage. They tell me nothing, of course, so that I am reduced to the necessity of bringing all my natural curiosity and powers of observation into play. Also my mathematical genius, by which I have discovered how to put two and two together—with the

above result. Already for months there has been a siege going on, in the progress of which the resisting stronghold has been bombarded with endless bouquets, boxes of cut flowers (the latter fuller, perhaps of 'language'); also with boxes of bonbons. I note that the latter, which began by being all from Maillard, the favorite of the besieger, are now all from Huyler, the preference of the besieged. You may think it was an easy matter for me to discover these facts. Nothing of the sort. Direct questions only elicited the information that they had been sent by 'a friend.' That, if you remember, has always been one of Lilian's exasperating little discretions.

"The name of the man who is to be my brother-in-law (unless all signs fail) is no other than Earle Persé, whom you may still remember as a very correct and proper young man about town. Not a bad fellow, after all, and will perhaps make a good balance-wheel for our little Lilian.

"—By-the-way, I have borne in mind your injunctions about M. P., and am sure you must be right. As an impartial observer, I must acknowledge that she seems to be quite unobjectionable. Thank Heaven, however, I stand committed to nothing, at least until I am a graduated Medicus. Time enough. I only mention this to show that I have not forgotten.

"—I have wasted so much time over family news that here I am at the end of my leisure and have not a minute to give gist of enclosed, so send it bodily."

The "enclosed" was a sheet torn from a letter signed Paul King, wherein, after a portion of an enthusiastic description of Japan and the life there, he concluded by saying that he was so under the fascination of it, that he was strongly tempted to make it his home; that in any case, if not for always, it would be for many years to come—so inexhaustible were the interests it offered.

As Nora read a great wave of misery passed over her. Unconsciously to herself she had still treasured a lurking hope that the day would come when Paul would return; that in the end all would be well. Meanwhile she fancied that she was driving him slowly and steadily out of her heart, as he had gone from her life. She was bitterly disappointed with herself to discover that she had deceived herself; that she was weak—weak. She threw herself on her knees by her bedside with the bit of Paul's letter in her hand, sobbing as though her heart would break.

"It is as if I had lost him anew!" she cried to herself, and her heart sank in despair at the prospect of her task of renunciation having to be begun all over again. This year past, she had struggled conscientiously to drive the memory of Paul from her. She had imagined she was succeeding—and it needed only this to undo the results of her labor. Alas! alas! How contemptibly weak of her to allow any one in the world to possess such a hold upon her! How could she escape from such detestable thralldom—how regain her independence of heart and mind? She cried bitter tears of disappointed love—in part—

also of anger at herself and her own "imbecility," was the word she used to herself.

The door opened. Marion hesitated on the threshold.

"Come in, come—" said Nora wearily, rising from her knees, her face all blurred and tear-stained. She threw her arms impulsively around Marion's neck, still clasping the bit of paper. "Oh Marion! A ghost has suddenly risen up and frightened me! I am such a fool! I have honestly tried so hard to get over it all!"

Marion was all tender gentleness to her "child," as she fondly called her, waiting patiently, the while, for the explanation of this mystification until the paroxysm of Nora's grief should pass.

"Read, dear. That is quickest. Then you will understand what a fool I am. Why should I care? Why should I not be able to get the better of it when my will is determined to do so?"

Marion read: "Of course you are upset, dear—but quite unnecessarily discouraged. Don't despair. It is the death-blow of your last hope, childie. It hurts; and it startled you, because you did not know you still had any hope; but the worst is over now. Your work will not have been wasted. On the contrary, this will complete it definitely."

"You are such a help and comfort! What would become of me without you!" said Nora.

"And I intend to help you, dear," said Marion, in a low, earnest voice, "until I can feel that I have saved you from spoiling and throwing away all that

is best in your life, my child. You have got to be happy, if I can make you so," she added, more in her usual cheerful, matter-of-fact tone, "even in spite of yourself! So cheer up."

As the two women now threw themselves with even greater zeal and energy into their sight-seeing, Nora by degrees regained her accustomed calm cheerfulness and interest. She had a more earnest look on her sweet face than of yore, and her eyes were bright with a spirit of determination.

Marion watched her keenly, well-satisfied with the way in which she was renewing the battle against herself. "I really do believe that was the last agony of hope," she said to herself, and dared to look forward for Nora, until such time as she could herself face the thought of a possible happy future.



## XLVIII.

### DAYS OF ENCHANTMENT.

Florence exercises over the human heart a charm quite its own. It appeals to the eye, to the intellect, to everything by which pleasure is conveyed inward to the heart. Nora, impressionable and responsive as was her nature, could not resist coming under its influence; and in the bright spring days that now followed each other like a string of rare and precious pearls, she did not fail to enjoy it with all the zest of youth, and with the appreciation of the artist.

The galleries offered an inexhaustible source of keen enjoyment for the mornings; in the afternoons the Cascine exercised its share in the general charm. Sitting at a tiny table in front of the little café not far from the great entrance, they watched the people drive past—people of every grade, every nationality, every type. Or, climbing the hill to San Miniato, they liked to sit and look at the lovely view down the Valley of the Arno, over the City of Flowers, remembering its many tragical tales and legends of centuries long gone by; to see, in imagination, its wars, its sieges, its intestine battles; its house to house, hand to hand fights.

Few cities appeal so strongly to one's love of romance; every stone seeming to have its tale to contribute to one's attentive ear. Florence in spring! A whole chapter of delights and emotions in three words.

Florence's romantic charm extended itself, apparently, so far outside of Michael Angelo's walls that it struck our good friend Sir James; for, before Nora's visit was half over, he casually, apparently quite accidentally, met them one day walking in the Via Tornabuoni, near Doney's. They had missed him often, and had many a time said to one another: "if only Sir James were here, he would be able to explain this, clear up that mystery, tell us the other historical tale." When he appeared in the flesh, it was as one conjured up by wishing. Both women were unaffectedly glad to see him—Marion, perhaps, a trifle less enthusiastically than when they had met in Rome—but still very cordially.

Nora's manner to Sir James had ever been very much the same since she had first met him. She showed undisguised pleasure in his conversation, and made no pretense of not admiring his intelligence, cultivation and learning. Further than that, nothing. Now she was acquiring a sense of reliance, and turned to him for information as to a walking encyclopaedia, or a compendium of history; in fact, as to a whole library of works of reference. She acknowledged to herself that it was an education to associate with a man of the style of mind of Sir James. This, together with his geniality and a certain, almost

boyish capacity for enjoyment, made him altogether a delightful companion.

After Florence came Bologna (with its lovely St. Cecilia of Raphael) Padua, then, one lovely moonlight night, Venice!

In the ten days that followed, Nora realized that never before had she experienced so full a satisfaction to the eye, to the senses, as Venice gave her. Such a richness of color in itself, such wealth in its architecture and monuments; such pictures! One pair of eyes, one heart, one brain did not suffice to enjoy it all!

"What a debt of gratitude we poor little moderns owe to those rich old Magnificos, who loved art and their city well enough to pour out their gold unstintedly upon her! But for their large magnificence, how much poorer the artistic world would be," said Nora within herself.

And besides all this, the quaintness and charm of the water-ways; the silent, slow-gliding, mysterious gondolas! That they should be black, struck Nora at first as mournful and gloomy.

"What do you think of the gondolas, now that you have become accustomed to the blackness of them, Nora?" asked Marion, one warm, brilliant afternoon toward sunset, when every color of the rainbow seemed struggling for predominance over the lagoons, over the city, and in the skies above.

"Oh, I like it," answered Nora in a positive tone. "It has grown now to seem to me the right thing; on the same principle that the black velvet around

the neck of a pretty girl only serves to accentuate her own beauty, and that of her gay toilette, by its contrast."

Only a day or two before leaving Venice, they again met Sir James, whose holiday was now drawing to its close. He acknowledged having stopped over a day or two for the sole purpose of seeing their enjoyment, and to hear their impressions. "After which, I must go back to the London season and its conventional pleasures," he said a little ruefully, much like a boy going back to school after the holidays.

The last evening of his stay, by the light of a glorious moon, he escorted Marion to the Piazza San Marco where, sitting at a little table in front of Florian's, they ate ices and listened to the band discourse sweet music. Enchanting experience to Nora, whose soul was ever most responsive to every impression of beauty, whether of form, of color or of sound. She sat like one entranced, with her eyes now on the quaint façade of the Procuratie Vecchie and the old clock tower; now above on the deep, blue vault of the heavens, with its myriad stars and great white moon; now on the delicate fretwork outlines of San Marco's church silhouetted against the clear sky; on the great, high campanile whose top looked as though suspended in mid-air. When the music ceased, they strolled meditatively through the Piazzetta, past the wonderful Palace of the Doges, with its magnificence of art, and its associations of human sorrows; past the columns, the Lion; down to the water's edge, where the gondoliers in crowds, buzzed about them like

huge bees, bidding for their patronage. Then in the gondola, quietly propelled by the dim, graceful figure at their backs, gliding, skimming mysteriously, silently, over enchanted waters, bathed by a magic moon.

Nora, under the spell of its fascination, was a poor companion as far as speech went, or any effort to give expression to her deep feeling. But Sir James was quite satisfied; quite content to follow her train of thought in imagination, and the while to love her all the more.

"When I can run away again, will you allow me to come and see you in Paris?" he asked, at parting, holding Nora's hand a moment longer than was his custom.

"Most certainly," she answered with frank cordiality. "It will be delightful to talk over our various adventures and impressions of Italy—won't it Marion?"

If Sir James had looked for any evidence of greater warmth of feeling on her part, he must have been disappointed. Her frank absence of embarrassment was such as would have discouraged the average admirer. But Sir James was above all things a man who knew his own mind, and knowing it, was content to work it out, with patient determination, to the end.

## XLIX.

### THE RISE AND FALL OF LILIAN.

Out of respect for the memories of Romeo and Juliet, our travelers stopped to cast a hurried glance at Verona; thence, over the beautiful Brenner Pass they went to Innsbruck, and to Munich with its galleries.

The end of May found them back again in the rue Selviac, stronger, healthier, with bright eyes, rosy cheeks; full of energy for their work, and with minds stored for all time with delightful visions and memories.

Nora gladly took up her brush again, fired anew by zeal for her art.

Marion found that her work had so accumulated in her absence, that for some weeks, the friends hardly met for more than hurried meals, outside of their evenings, to which they clung as to something precious.

More letters came from home announcing Lilian's engagement in due course. Jack added his comments on the event. "My private opinion is that they had better waste no time over their engagement, for Persé Père is looking like Old Harry. He looks

exactly as if he saw ghosts all the time. Had I my diploma, my opinion would no doubt be worth more; but as it is, the old man makes a bad impression on me."

So, no doubt did he on the rest of the family, for the engagement was short; and in June, the month of roses, Lilian, always like a rosebud herself, became Mrs. Earle Persé, marrying one of the richest young men in New York. In July they went to Newport, scoring an immense success socially by Lilian's beauty, their wealth, their aristocratic traditions, etc., etc.

In August, Mr. Persé, the elder, had a sudden seizure, and in three days was dead. Apoplexy, they said. He left his affairs in a most unfortunate tangle. It transpired that for some time past, the deluded man had been tempted into speculations in Wall street; had lost; had gone deeper in hopes of recovering what he had lost and of gaining more. The same old story we hear so often, none the less tragic and melancholy for its frequency—until Death suddenly called him away, and his heirs found practically nothing left to tell the tale of his former colossal fortune.

It was from her faithful correspondent, Jack,—her "Chronicler" as he called himself—that Nora learned this melancholy news. He recounted how the double shock of death and loss of fortune had staggered the survivors, one and all. The mother, prostrated, crushed; Earle, dazed and stupefied; Lilian, horrified by the sudden change in her own position

following so swiftly upon her happiness and triumph. She, spoiled child of fortune, felt herself personally aggrieved, and refused to be consoled.

In this chaos of grief, bitterness, disappointment, the one person who showed both heart and head was Mildred.

Jack wrote:

"Your instinct was true, dear Nora. Mildred is made of no common stuff, and has acted all along, and is still acting in a way to win the respect of everyone—myself included. She is the only one who has any cool common-sense, and at the same time plenty of feeling. Under all her quiet manner, she has any amount of character. Her black is becoming to her, and when one comes to know her in this way, off the stage as it were, you have no idea what a nice little woman she is."

Amid all Nora's sympathy and chagrin for all concerned, a smile of quiet satisfaction spread over her fair face as she read this last. "Perhaps, now, Jack will not try so jealously to preserve his three years' freedom."

That Jack should be happy, was one of the most earnest longings of her life; as he certainly was, of all her friends, the one she most dearly loved.

## L

### SIR JAMES IS CAUTIOUS.

Sir James, in parting from Nora in Venice, had seen all too clearly by her frank, friendly, unembarrassed manner, that he had not yet succeeded in making the kind of impression he desired. That she liked him, and well too, he was quite certain; but he, nevertheless, returned to London discontented with the progress of his suit. He feared to risk offering himself yet, for the probability of a refusal seemed too great. So, instead of going over to Paris in the late season to declare himself, he forced himself to be content with continuing on the footing of friendship which had been granted him. That, in itself, was too delightful to risk the loss of through a premature proposal of marriage.

On the occasion of his next visit, he found Nora much elated by a series of successes and compliments for her miniatures, for which she was now getting orders. In this, Marion's connection with the art-world and art-dealers had been of material assistance, by giving Nora her first start. Once known, her work was its own advertisement, and from that time on, she was never idle. It was, too, a source of great satisfaction to herself to see her income grow

by her own efforts; and to feel that her work had now raised her out of the ranks of the amateur to that of the professional artist.

It was such absorbing, interesting, congenial occupation that it came between Paul's image and her own heart, and at last it seemed to her that she had conquered; that the haunting ghost of her over-mastering love for him was at last laid.

Sir James was, in his heart, distinctly jealous of Nora's profession, for he saw in it a formidable rival to himself. He had, however, the good sense to bide his time, working, meanwhile, to render himself as necessary a part of her intellectual and artistic life as in him lay, and to hope. As he knew her better and better, understanding the depths and undercurrents of her serious nature as well as the maturity of her mind, he did not despair; but set himself with renewed determination to win the woman who, each day, wound herself more and more closely about his heart.



## LI.

### THE WANDERER.

It is already January again. The steamer from Yokohama to Hong Kong is filled with smart people going down to the Races. It is quite the event of the year to many on board. Nearly all are acquainted, and to judge by the talking, laughing and jollity to be heard on all sides, the enjoyment of the excursion has already begun.

Paul King wanted to see these Races, on the same ground that he had been running about everywhere for the past twenty months or more; but he was out of tune with the social element here prevailing. Society never had had any attraction for him save for that one brief, memorable season at home, and it had only left him with a confirmed active distaste for it. Therefore it was that he now sat, or walked by turns, quite by himself, wrapped in his own evidently unsatisfactory musings.

A fair, slender English girl said to her companion, as Paul passed by: "A handsome man, but awfully gloomy-looking."

He had started on this trip without his usual traveling-companion, of whom he was getting weary. A

good fellow, Trevors, but his limitations had been reached months and months before. Paul thought he should enjoy his own company quite as well. But he did not. He had been getting depressed, low-spirited, "utterly demoralized," as he expressed it, for months past. Now, having by his own choosing forced himself into uninterrupted commune with himself, he made up his mind once for all to "have it out" with himself, and clear away if possible this cloud of dissatisfaction, of bitterness, so foreign to his nature, which seemed to be growing upon him and eating into his soul.

"I am becoming a compendium of all the very qualities I have most despised in others, and I'm sick to death of it," said he gloomily to himself. "What have I been doing this year or more but trying by travel, by rapid change, by throwing myself into a thousand passing interests and excitements, to get what some men seek in opium, others in alcohol—forgetfulness.

"I who always flattered myself on the soundness and healthiness of my own cool head and common-sense, have permitted myself to be completely bowled-over by a pair of grey eyes that I would have staked by life on being as true as steel—eyes that, if ever eyes did, looked as though one could see right into the depths of the pure soul that lay beneath! And when I discovered that they were, after all, only flesh-and-blood eyes; that the soul that lay behind them was no more noble than the soul of the next society

girl, I must allow my whole mental tone to be influenced by the disappointment! It is contemptible!

"Here have I been running about after shadows all this time, and why? Just because of a fit of jealous rage. However, that was real enough, if nothing else. It was abominable, intolerable to have such a stupid brute as that Persé preferred to me!"

As though the unfortunate ball had been the affair of the night before, the hot blood rushed to Paul's head, and he felt again the same desire to fall upon his successful rival, that he had had in his heart that evening.

"If I could have believed that she was marrying for love, it might have been easier to bear. But it was such an evident case of money-bags and the highest bidder!" Paul walked up and down, moodily, gloomily thinking. "But after all, I must confess she had never *said* anything to arouse false hopes. Yes, but people don't need to *say*. Just see how in a thousand ways she showed, as a woman knows so well how to show—and sometime quite unconsciously—the pleasure she felt at the presence (as *I* imagined) of the man she cared for! Clever man that I thought myself, I read a thousand signs. The pretty, shell-like pink of her cheek, how it used to deepen when I came forward to greet her! How for quite a time, there toward the end, her pretty, dear eyes—how I have loved—how I *do* love those dear eyes—fiends' or angels', whichever they may be! How she seemed to scarcely dare to raise them before me. Was that mere acting? I remember how my manly van-

ity was flattered the first time I noticed that. I felt as though I had captured the stronghold; that there was nothing for me to do but to declare myself conqueror.

"And then, finally, that night at the ball. The words were just on my lips. At least I was saved making a fool of myself—saved by a slip of a girl who always seemed to me young enough to be still in the school-room. Yet *she* saw it—she saw how I cared. When my head cleared off a little afterwards, I half suspected she cared herself, and that that had sharpened her eyes—only that she was so young! Fluffy-haired, blue-eyed, innocent doll, little did she realize *what* it meant to me! Her tiny hand couldn't staunch that wound!

"Never in my life before or since have I felt such blind, hot, jealous rage as that night—and never again in all my life, I trust, will anything hit so hard. Now it is over and done. I wonder how many times I have said that to myself? When will it be over and done?

"The feeling comes over me so strongly at times—it is here now—that if I could only meet her once more—meet her quite calmly, quite dispassionately, and see for myself whether or not she did intentionally deceive me; or whether she only married the other fellow under pressure of circumstances.

"After all, she was poor herself. The aunt and uncle may have argued her into it. Perhaps she did, according to her lights, act fairly. Perhaps it is all my own imagination, thinking I read signs.

Perhaps I am a blind old duffer. Perhaps the little lady with the blue eyes—but that is too far-fetched. She would have had no motive in running me off the field. Self-interest? She was too young and not deeply enough versed in the ways of the world for that—

“So it goes, as usual, around and around, in a vicious circle—and how I wish I were out of it! How I long to settle down in peace and quiet in a home of my own! As strongly as I longed formerly for travel do I now long for rest. The re-action from overdoing it—I know it well enough. But where to go—what to set myself about?

“I am a famous fraud. I can preach to others, can set the machinery going—look at that excellent Jack—but I have no energy myself. Full of high ideals before, my troubles have made me of no use but to theorize. I myself am the proof of the truth of my old saying: Theory is the pitfall of the semi-intellectual—May I now pretend even to intelligence, let alone intellectuality? Oh Paul, Paul, you are a contemptible fraud! Contemptible, because you are an utterly useless cumberer of the earth!

“Yes, yes! It is settled at last! I will go home. I will once more look into Nora’s eyes and see if she was true or false. I will try if I cannot, with my good, old friend Jack’s help, find some useful interest in life. He says that I threw light on his future for him—perhaps he may return the compliment. His rare letters have always the same old ring—only how few and far between they have been! So much for

my restless wanderings—otherwise I should know more about his family than that his cousin is living abroad and his sister still insatiable as to social pleasures.

“Did Nora marry? That question of itself is torture when it comes to me. Of course she married! How do I know it? Why should I doubt it? Everything has simply confirmed what Lilian showed to my doubting eyes. I suppose, though, when I get in these moods nothing short of her marriage-certificate would set my mind at rest. I torment myself with doubts, hopes, fears, knowing all the while that I may spare myself useless pain—that it is all over and done. Nevertheless, now I have made up my mind. By return steamer I shall go back to Yokohama, wind up matters there; then by way of Suez and Europe, back home—home—to begin a new life.

“If Nora is living abroad, might I not manage, perhaps, to see her once, and satisfy myself—just once?”



## LII.

### MRS. LANGFORD SPEAKS HER MIND.

Ever since Jack's visit to Paris before leaving for America, Marion had espoused the cause of Sir James with far less zeal and enthusiasm. She certainly approved of him no less, having had no reason to change her opinion of him in any way. But Jack had so won her heart that she could not believe it possible that Nora should not in time become attached to him; and why should he not care for her? Nora had charm enough for others, why not for him?

Of the two men, her fancy espoused the cause of Jack, and her hard sense and worldly-wisdom that of Sir James, who could offer a position than which none could be better suited to her tastes and interests.

"Come what may, I shall at least not put a straw's weight in the balance against Mr. Jack," she said to herself, meditating over the situation. "If he has any chance, or wants it, I shall not prevent his success—on the contrary."

As a result of this, Marion came one day into the room where Nora was working, and apropos of nothing in particular brought up the subject of Jack. Nora's clear brow and peaceful expression for some

time past had reassured her as to the final relegation of all question of Paul King among the memories of the past.

"You will be obliged one of these days, my dear, to decide to settle yourself in life. I myself do not believe in unprotected females wandering about the world—if they can help themselves—much less good-looking ones. What would become of you if anything happened to me—say that I married Harvey, or Massinger—or died (not that I contemplate either just now); or that we quarrelled beyond repair? You would simply have to go back to your family. I don't believe you would enjoy the present ménage, eh? No; you will certainly have to marry. Why not Jack, Nora?"

"There you are again, harping on your favorite theme. I have told you *so* often dear, good Marion, that Jack and I do not care for each other in that way. Please don't think any more about it."

"But you may be mistaken as regards him, Nora; and you might learn to like him from a different point of view," Marion persisted.

"But I don't wish to. Don't you see how absolutely unacceptable I should be to the family? It would be a piece of flagrant ingratitude on my part, knowing their ideas as I do. No; do drop it, dear Marion," said Nora wearily. "Moreover, I know a very nice girl at home who in days gone by was *the* match in all New York that his mother would have had him make. I urged him to cultivate her acquaintance and to consider the matter."

"What !!!" ejaculated Marion, indignantly.

"Yes; and moreover, from what he writes, the affair is evidently progressing well, although I am not so sure that in the end the family will be altogether satisfied. 'The best laid plans of mice and men,' you know, Marion, 'gang aft agley.' But one can't please everybody. As long as dear old Jack is pleased and happy, that is, to my mind, the essential point," and Nora put her hand on one side to examine the effect of the last touch she had given to her work. "Yes," she continued, complacently, not noticing Marion's expression; "Yes, I have every reason to hope that my first and only attempt at match-making is going to prove a success."

"Well, of all the mad things I ever heard!" exclaimed Marion, her indignation at last finding vent in words. "You send Jack off to make love to someone else, when by a sign, a lifting of the finger you might have married him yourself—"

"Stay—that is the invention of your own vivid imagination, Marion. Remember, you have absolutely no proof whatever to support your theory," said Nora, hotly.

"I have eyes in my head, and am no novice in the ways of the world, and I have my own opinion, whatever you may choose to think. I don't doubt you do sincerely think as you say. That I don't question. But for a clever woman, as you certainly are in many ways, you have made a perfect mess of your love-affairs. There is poor Sir James. I suppose you will send him to the right about too; a man who

certainly has made no secret of his admiration for you, for how long is it now? Well over a year. No. It has been my experience in life that the cleverest women, when it comes to their love-affairs, will make perfect fools of themselves. You will do just like a hundred others; throw aside one excellent man after another, and, in the end, when you begin to feel yourself getting beyond your first youth, take up some crooked stick. You try my patience."

"And you mine," retorted Nora, half angry, half laughing at Marion's excited indignation. "Come, calm your ruffled plumage. Do not make me feel as though you were tired of me," Nora said, in a winning, lovable way, all her own. "I am so happy here! I do enjoy my work and my bit of success so much! Why should I marry anyone? But there," she added, hastily, "I don't really ask you, for I fear you will begin another tirade; and I would rather love you and laugh with you than quarrel, for I generally get the worst of it—indeed, we gain nothing by it. Do let Jack be happy in his own way. And perhaps if Sir James has the good sense to wait until I feel myself getting beyond my first youth, I might in the end bring myself into a sufficiently sacrificial spirit to marry him."

Marion could not well tell how far Nora was in earnest, but felt that to say more would be worse than useless. One thing she did see clearly: there was no possible question of Jack; and from that moment she set herself to work to aid and abet Sir James in all his efforts to please and win Nora.



### LIII.

#### WEDDING BELLS.

It was early in that same month of January, when Paul King was on his way to the Hong Kong Races, that Sir James first offered himself to Nora.

She frankly confessed to him her sincere, warm regard, and the value she set on his friendship. She told him, furthermore, just enough of her past to make him understand that she had, as she thought, no heart to give to any man. It would be an injustice to him, in his kindness and love, to make so poor a return. He plead and reasoned. She doubted herself. Finally a term of probation was agreed upon, in which to decide the matter. Therefore it was already February when Nora at last consented to marry Sir James, he only too gladly accepting such feeling of affectionate regard as she in her honesty acknowledged.

"After all," he had said; "we accept each other much on the same terms. You tell me you gave the best of your heart away long ago; I, too, loved my wife dearly—very dearly. We have no reproaches to make one another. Let us turn over a new, blank page and write the story of our lives afresh

upon it from this day, dear. Trust me as I do you. With the basis of sincere friendship that we begin with, I think you need not worry about our ultimate happiness."

He was, unquestionably, all that was kind, good and devoted. It would not have been possible for Nora to fail having for him a sincere respect and regard.

Naturally the consent of Mrs. Stanley (and the Major), was cordially given, the only stipulation being that the marriage should take place from the house of those who stood in the light of parents to her. "Our old-fashioned ideas could be satisfied with nothing else," they wrote.

So it came about that one windy day in latest March, when the clouds were madly chasing each other across the face of the sun, making alternate gloom and glory, Nora sat before the looking-glass while Lilian, who had insisted upon performing that office for her, pinned on her wedding-veil.

Lilian's little rose-bud face was much sharper, more pinched than of yore; there was a certain change in it which betokened a temper not sweetened by the lapse of time, nor chastened by the untowardness of events. She had thought, poor child, to draw the largest prize in the matrimonial lottery, and had won instead, in point of fact, a very commonplace, well-meaning, narrow, kind, dull husband. Instead of the independence of a home of her own, she must be glad and thankful to remain in the old home, subject to the old-fashioned rule of her mother and father,

into whose ideas there entered no vestige of approval of the independence of modern young married women, and no conception of any alternative from accepting marriage literally "for better, for worse."

Lilian had, therefore, by her circumstances and her mourning, been forced into leading a life totally new, totally uncongenial to her. Small wonder that a certain acerbity was creeping into her manner, her speech—her face.

"I am so glad, dear," she said, as she arranged the veil and deftly set the orange-blossoms in place; "I am so glad you are marrying such a nice, sensible man. Not one that I can fancy a girl falling awfully in love with, you know—but that is not necessary now-a-days. And then you have always been so superiorly sensible. There was a time when I half imagined you had a fancy for that heavy, pragmatical, old Paul King. Do you remember him that winter? But I am glad I was mistaken. I thought him a good deal of a bore, myself."

The last pin ran a little into Nora's head, which might have accounted for the slightly impatient start she gave, and for the passing flash of red that showed in her cheeks.

It was a strange thing to see in her wedding-party, Lilian accompanied by the man she herself had so repeatedly refused. There was no sense of triumph or exaltation on her own part, for she had suffered too much real sorrow and pain these past years for there to be any room in her heart for small or mean feelings. Nora had, moreover, supported herself

through these few trying weeks at home, by the memory of all the true loving-kindness these good people had shown her in times past, and reproached herself for not being able to enjoy being with them again.

Jack was an exception. He had been a comfort and delight to her; and she had made it a point to see all she could, in this hurried visit, of the brave little woman who she now felt sure, would before long, be Jack's wife.

The quiet ceremony is over. The small, informal wedding-breakfast has been duly gone through. Lady Nora Glencoe has departed with her husband by the steamer which is to take them away once more to foreign lands.

Major and Mrs. Stanley beamed at one another in unfeigned satisfaction at the wisdom and good sense of Nora's choice, already making plans for the time when they should go to England to visit them in their own home.

To Marion, who stayed on for a while after the departure of the happy couple, Mrs. Stanley confided her approval of Nora's character and behavior. "I confess it will always remain incomprehensible to me why she preferred an independent life. Otherwise I consider her quite irreproachable. There was a time long ago when I had fears that she might turn Jack's head—all young and foolish together, you know; but that danger passed. Of course, you can understand, with our old-fashioned ideas how utterly impossible such a marriage would have been."—



"My dear," said Marion, relating the conversation to Nora later on; "I had thought myself at my age past blushing, but when this kind and trustful old lady said that in her pleasant, complacent way, my face was like burning coals of fire, and my conscience too. If only she had known how hard I had worked against her peace of mind!"

## LIV.

### BY THE SAPPHIRE SEA.

Sir James and Nora had planned for their honeymoon a visit to the Riviera, whence they would slowly wend their way to London, arriving in time to open their house for a few weeks before the season's close. In his pride and happiness, Sir James wished to present his young wife to those interested friends who had so persistently urged upon him to re-marry.

May had already begun by the time they reached Monte Carlo, a spot new to Nora. It was their intention to stop there only for a day or two.

Nora was tranquilly content. Her husband's excellent qualities claimed her regard more each day, as she grew to understand him better. They were excellent friends; had kindred tastes and an unbounded trust and respect for each other. An unexciting, unromantic sort of happiness, but good of its kind, and liable to fewer disillusiones and shocks of disappointment.

One element of contentment for Nora's generous nature, and a source of constant gratification, lay in the realization of the power she had to make Sir James happy. If one cannot realize all one's own brightest

dreams, surely it is not a bad substitute to make others happy.

She was looking handsomer than ever, with a certain added touch of self-confidence and dignity that became her well. She was dressed exquisitely, and, as she stood, late in the afternoon, by the balustrade of the terrace back of the Casino over-looking the beautiful blue sea, no eye that rested on her slim, tall, graceful figure and fair face quitted the sight without a conscious and distinct sense of pleasure. One could hardly fail to notice her where she stood.

Below was the greensward where the little pigeons fly out of box-like traps, to be shot at, and more often maimed than killed, for so-called sport; those escaping by chance, flying back to perch under the Casino eaves, ready, poor foolish things, to furnish another moment's sport at a later day.

Nora was thinking what an inharmonious element the pigeon-shooting was, just when all else was suggestive of the joy of life in this beautiful world. The idea of selfish, unthinking cruelty was discordant and jarring.

Sir James had left her for a few minutes to make enquiries and arrangements about their train for the following day. She preferred the open terrace to the hotel, so chose to wait for him there, finding plenty to occupy eyes and thoughts.

Her parasol over her shoulder, her dress gracefully caught up in her hand; so she stood, and so a pair of eyes that had long looked for her, hungered for the sight of her, found her at last—at last!

Paul stood for some minutes looking; satisfied to enjoy even that sensation alone.

A friend once described vividly how she had stood, in a dense fog, on the deck of an ocean steamer, when suddenly, the fog lifting, she saw directly ahead, the high, rocky cliffs of the Irish coast, toward which they were hurrying—her paralyzing sense of fright!

Some such feeling overwhelmed Nora as she turned her head, no doubt under the influence of his steady gaze, and met Paul's eyes. Every vestige of color left her face, even her lips. The hand that grasped the parasol, and the other holding the dress, closed with a convulsive grip, and her heart bounded with the shock of fright.

Her habit of self-control stood her in good stead, for in a moment, by the time Paul had arrived within speaking distance of her, she was already quite quiet outwardly, and held out her hand in perfectly conventional fashion. But she was unaware that her face was ghastly pale, and that for a moment she had looked as though she would faint. "It was only the surprise," she said to herself, "that startled her so." But under all, was the sudden memory of all that she had suffered on this man's account, and the horror lest he should still have the power to disturb her hard-conquered peace of mind.

"How do you do, Mr. King. What a place this is for people to turn up unexpectedly." Woman-like, she had, the more quickly of the two, regained her self-possession.

Paul shook hands, stammering some perfectly

stupid, conventional greeting. Each felt the situation to be one where there was so much to say, so much each longed to know of the other, that conversation was constrained and unnatural.

"Is your husband here?" asked Paul.

"Oh certainly," answered Nora, her color beginning to come back. "He has left me for a moment. I shall be glad to introduce him to you."

"I have the pleasure of knowing him already."

"Ah, indeed. I was not aware of that."

Paul, surprised, stared at her calm, serious face.

"Oh yes; Miss Lilian told me about it before I left home."

"Then you have come from America?"

"Come from America? No, not recently."

"Then I can't quite understand," said Nora, puzzled.

"Certainly, Miss Lilian announced your approaching marriage to me, and moreover gave me ocular proof of your engagement."

Nora knit her brows, mystified.

"Do you not remember the night of the Darcy's ball? The night he proposed to you?"

"Remember?" She did, only too distinctly; but what had that to do with her marriage? "Lilian, my cousin Lilian told you then? Why, that is two years ago and more. I had not yet met my husband."

"What?" Paul came nearer, his dark brow contracting, a look of pent-up rage on his face that

startled Nora. "Do you mean to tell me that your cousin *lied*? That you were not engaged to Earle Persé? That you did not marry him?"

"No—no," said Nora, half frightened, not yet seizing the whole force of the abominable trick that had wrecked her happiness. "No; I never accepted—never even encouraged him."

"But I saw you together in the conservatory. You certainly *looked* as though there was a thorough and a tender understanding between you;" Paul laughed a bitter, mirthless laugh at the memory of all that sight had caused him.

"I tell you,—and every word I say is truth—your cousin told me you were to marry Earle Persé, the best match in town; moreover, to convince me—I no doubt seemed slow enough to believe it—she took me and showed me a sight I have never forgotten since. I was so filled with rage—yes, jealous rage, I must confess it once for all,—that I left on the spot. For I had hoped you cared for me! And it was a lie?"

There was a dead silence, a hush. The memories and hearts of both were so stirred to their depths that there was nothing either could say.

Finally Nora found her tongue. "That was more than two years ago, now. Forget it." Her voice was almost stern in its intensity, and the last two words struck on Paul's ear like a command.

Nora turned aside. It was all too horrible, too painful; if one could but wake up to find it only a

foolish, nightmare dream! Lillian? Lilian the traitress—the cause of the ruin of both their lives? But, at least he need not know that she, too, had suffered. That secret she must jealously guard, for her own sake—and for the sake of the loyalty she owed that other one! She had deliberately accepted *him* as her husband. *He* was not in fault. There must be no vestige of disloyalty to that man, come what might. Ah, for the pity of it! If only she can remember! Keep it before her strongly, firmly! A woman's honor should be just as precious as a man's. That had been the spirit of her upbringing and of her own loyal nature. Now was the time when she must prove whether or not her high convictions, her principles were of firm rock or of shifting sand. Her head swam and her knees felt as though they would fail her; but she closed her lips on the words of explanation, on her conjectures, her wonder. She knew that if she began, she must inevitably say what would betray to him the secret of the old love. The struggle was fierce, mighty, cruel.

Even if she no longer loved him as in those dear, foolish days, it would be a relief to her to have him know how she had tormented herself. But no. There was every reason against opening the subject, and no vestige of a plausible excuse in favor of it.

All she dared permit herself to say was a word of heartfelt anguish that Lilian should have stooped to such a trick—and for mere wanton, childish mischief.

“Perhaps not altogether as childish as we imag-

ine," said Paul with an angry laugh; "I remember she tried to console me herself, most prettily—but that"—

"That is all a long time ago, Mr. King. Forget it," repeated Nora, almost sternly—and Paul realized suddenly that he had allowed his pent-up wrath and grief to run away with him far, far beyond the limits of conventional politeness.

He was brought suddenly to a realization of the fact that he and a lady, whose married name was still unknown to him, were standing together, looking out over distant Monaco and the sapphire sea; that now and again the sudden dry crack of a discharging gun told of the missing, maiming or killing of one more unfortunate, harmless pigeon.

He had no reason or right to know whether that which he had been carried away into saying, would be tolerated; or whether looked upon as an impertinence beyond pardon.

"Do, please, forgive me, Miss Nora," he said, impulsively. "I have said so much more than I intended. It does sound like such ill-bred impertinence! You must think me a boor; but I have been away so long—have known so little of what happened, was so full of bitterness and rage!"

"I forgive you," said Nora, looking up at Paul with those eyes he had so often thought of, dreamed of—whose present look satisfied him once and for all, of the truth and purity of the soul that lay behind them.

"At least I was not mistaken in them," said he

to himself, as he took her hand almost reverently in his own; his heart and brain too deeply stirred for words.

"He did, then, love me in the past," thought Nora, as she gave him her hand; "but all that is left now is bitterness and rage at Lilian's vile and contemptible trick. It is better so. Yes—better so!"

## LV.

### DEARER THAN LIFE.

Nora turned the conversation out of the channel of personalities and kept it there until her husband rejoined them. Then she introduced the two men, shifting the entire burden of the conversation upon them, only joining in enough for kindly politeness.

Her whole soul was deeply disturbed by this meeting with Paul, as well as by all she had just learned. Thoughts crowded tumultuously through her brain, and among them came the clue to many of Lilian's remarks and innuendoes. In all her gentle life she had never experienced anything like the wrath and indignation that grew and grew in her now, as she rehearsed the past. She was slow to rouse to anger; but this had stirred her to the innermost fibre of her being.

Sir James was delighted to meet an old friend of Nora's; liked Americans, liked travelers and was much interested in Paul's account of this last journey by Suez and Brindisi. Nothing would satisfy him short of having Paul dine with them at the Hotel de Paris. Paul looked at Nora, wondering whether or not he should accept Sir James' invitation. She

politely endorsed it, but without any trace of eagerness, and he forthwith accepted, though still altogether uncertain of not having very seriously offended her by the roughness of his recent outburst.

"I can't help it now! 'Out of the fulness of the heart'—One can't always stop to choose times and words. Indeed, I do not think I am altogether sorry. It has been a relief to speak out."

He announced that he must leave them early, having to catch the night-train to Paris.

At dinner Nora again left the conversation chiefly to the two men, and when Paul had gone Sir James said: "I was afraid I had made a mistake in asking him to dine; I never saw you so stiff, Nora. I had imagined you would be pleased."

"You did quite right—I am tired—You do not yet know how really disagreeable I can be. No: it is not that I dislike Mr. King. On the contrary, we saw him a great deal at home. He is Jack's alter ego. But I am glad he is gone."

Nora looked at Sir James with a grave, sweet glance, back of which he could not read the thought: "I vow that you at least shall never have cause to suffer through him or through me—cost what it may. You said to me once 'trust me as I do you'—and you shall find me worthy of your trust—though it take life itself."

So the violence of the storm passed by, leaving after it, as do the storms of nature, the path strewn with wreckage, and a sense of infinite lassitude, but also a certain peace. Nora had been terribly troub-

led by the fear of her own weakness, dreading to discover that Paul might still have the old power to disturb her peace of mind. Now she had satisfied herself that her long fight had not been in vain; it had taught her that she could conquer where those considerations were at stake that were dearer to her than life or love.

The shock of the meeting had been staggering, her powers strained to their utmost limit of endurance; but the worst of the ordeal, she felt, was past, for Paul had once again and forever gone out of her life.



LVI.

A SHOCK.

It gave Sir James infinite satisfaction to re-open his London house; to once more surround himself with his old friends, and to witness their general approval of Nora.

His hitherto delightful salon, where had met together all the artistic and literary lions of the day, had been closed now for years, and it was with keen pleasure that the old *côterie* gathered together once more at the bidding of their former genial host.

Lady Nora did the honors graciously and with so much tact that she disarmed the criticism of those who might have felt inclined to be over-exacting of Sir James' choice. Her youth was the greatest fault they could bring against her; but that, as some one pointed out, was one which time would certainly cure.

Several weeks of social life of the most agreeable kind now followed, and it was not until the season was drawing towards its close that Sir James and Nora found themselves again making plans for another short journey. Their country-house was undergoing repairs; visiting about among friends was pleasant enough in the autumn, and they had many,



engagements for then; but, meanwhile, they longed for a cool holiday.

Among the old friends of Sir James' father, Sir Eric Glencoe, were a certain Mr. Morison Merivale and his wife, already well advanced in years; he, a writer on scientific subjects; she, a woman of great independence of mind with all the world, save her husband, to whom she yielded unquestioningly in all matters. Mr. Merivale had been greatly attracted by Nora, and, in the absence of an actual father-in-law, had fallen tacitly into that position. Mrs. Merivale thought her husband unnecessarily enthusiastic in his approval, but permitted herself to be induced to like Nora, though with more reserve. The old intimacy which had existed during the life-time of Sir Eric, and of Sir James' first wife, was renewed; and the days when they did not meet were looked upon by Mr. Merivale as incomplete.

"What are you going to do with yourselves this coming month," he had asked one day in July, when the thermometer was beginning to climb unpleasantly. "You have no plans? Then why not join us? We are going with a young Scotch fellow, a professor of botany (you may know him, Erskine Jerrold) to Switzerland. He is interested in Alpine flora; is going to do some walking through the mountains. We might settle down in some high, cool spot and enjoy perfect rest, while he hunts wild flowers. What say you?"

"It sounds breezy and restful. That is all we ask for," said Sir James. "What say you, Nora?"

Nora was well pleased with the idea of rusticating, and of a chance to do some sketching and other work. So it was arranged; and early August found the party already installed a week and more in a comfortable, plain, mountain inn perched on the shoulder of the Stockelberg.

The Scotch professor proved to be a harmless creature, so filled with learning on a variety of subjects that he rarely found himself near enough to the ordinary, commonplace world of every-day life to open his mouth in speech. He was so clever that he had nothing to say for himself, unless in his books and professorial chair; so that the party was practically four-sided. All perceiving that he was happiest when left to himself, undisturbed, they soon paid little heed to the thin, red-bearded, bespectacled little man. He was quite content, for each day added some treasure to his collection. This Nora found out, for he occasionally came to the surface and broke into speech when alone with her.

One day the question arose of a tramp to the Hackenstock. It was such a small undertaking that Mr. Merivale thought that he himself would join the party. His wife intimated a willingness to follow his lead, but he objected, on the ground of the fatigue for her; wherefore she submitted without further argument, assuming that, as she might not go, neither should Nora. Nora, not wishing to make ungracious comparisons as to their respective ages and powers of endurance, consented to forego the pleasure the tramp would have given her. She was

disappointed, for the view, it was said, was superb, and the walk an insignificant one.

"You would not like me to go?" said Nora to Sir James, half begging, yet not wanting to be too urgent.

"No, indeed; stay and keep Mrs. Merivale company, and have tea ready for us. It is a small matter, and we shall be back by five, surely." So it was settled, the two wives, the grey-haired one, and the younger one, standing, shading their eyes from the sun with their hands, watching the little procession set out. Mr. Merivale, Sir James, the Professor, and the two sons of the landlord; fine, stalwart, serious fellows, picturesque in their mountaineers' dress.

"They have at least a perfect day," said Nora, as she turned a little regretfully to the house, having waited until Sir James, with a wave of the hand, had turned a corner of the path which hid the party from view. Nora was thoughtful and absent-minded, movement being far more to her taste at the moment than sitting at home to play the old lady. But this seemed absurd and selfish, and both women soon busied themselves with their favorite occupations; and, after all, the time did pass, not so hopelessly long as it had seemed in anticipation.

Jeanne, who had faithfully followed her young mistress' fortunes ever since the apartment in the rue Selviac had been closed, and who was devoted to her service even to the extent of braving the terrors of "*ce traître d'ocean*"—Jeanne was preparing the

cosy tea-table for the returning party, when the little Mädchen put her head in at the door, beckoning to her mysteriously.

Mrs. Merivale and Nora sat by the window embroidering and chatting, intending presently to walk as far as the turn in the path to meet the pedestrians.

Jeanne left the room. She was gone some time, and the two women were just folding away their work and rising to go out, when Jeanne re-opened the door. Nora looked up absent-mindedly, perhaps to see if she was already bringing in the tea so soon—perhaps simply to exchange a kindly smile and word with her good old servant, when her hands dropped to her sides, and a horrible fear seized her. Jeanne's face was terrifying to look upon, perfectly convulsed with fright and grief.

"Mr. Merivale!" thought Nora instantly. "Poor old man! The effort has been too much for him. He is ill—he is perhaps—Oh, horrors! not dead! and yet Jeanne's face!"

Jeanne came to her young mistress, and, throwing her arms about her, sobbed so that Nora had to soothe and comfort her before she could hear what she had to tell. There were others coming into the room, too. Why, there was Mr. Merivale himself! Why had she troubled herself so?

"*C'est qu'il est arrivé un accident à Milord,*" moaned Jeanne between her sobs. She would have given her life for her mistress, poor soul, but control herself she could not.

Nora's face blanched. She pushed Jeanne aside

almost roughly. "Where is he—take me to him quickly! Perhaps you are wasting precious moments that may mean life or death. Quick, show me the way." Nora started hastily to leave the room, but Jeanne clung to her. "No, no, don't go—don't go there!" she almost shrieked. But Nora did not stop to listen. Mr. Merivale came quickly forward, and laid his hand on her arm.

"No haste can avail now, poor child. An ugly accident—most absurdly trifling—" here his old voice was choked by a dry sob—"Absurdly trifling, but fatal!"

"I must go to him," said Nora, hotly, angrily, breaking away from the kind hands that would gladly have spared her.

She had her way. She went where he lay stretched out, as the landlord's sons had carried them both home, by the side of the Professor—both dead.

Nora saw—then a merciful darkness closed down upon her over-strained mind.

## LVII.

### MR. MERIVALE'S STORY.

Jeanne had been almost beside herself for awhile with the sudden shock and grief, but when she saw her poor young mistress lying white, still and unconscious on the bed to which they quickly carried her, she regained her wits and usefulness. The first thing she did was to get Mrs. Merivale, stunned and dazed though the poor lady was, to telegraph to Mrs. Langford in Paris; summoning at the same time the nearest physician.

When the latter arrived, he found Nora's condition very serious, and shook his head sadly and sympathetically over the tragic occurrence.

"So young, so beautiful—so happy only a few hours ago!" they said, the hearts of all, young, old, worldly-wise, ignorant, were touched and softened by the sad plight to which poor Nora was reduced.

Good Dr. Bremer, a kind, sensible physician, feeling it to be desirable to have better advice than his own on Nora's condition, entreated the famous Dr. von Eulenbach, who was summering in the little watering-place at the foot of the Hackenstock, to give his opinion of the case.

So that really the poor child could not have been in better hands than those in which Marion found her, when she arrived the following day. She instantly assumed the responsibility and direction of everything in which a woman could be of use, cabling at once for Jack, as the only available relative she could think of to attend to Nora's affairs.

Marion was thankful to have these details to think of, for they served to help her bear the heart-rending grief which she felt for the two good friends so terribly visited.

Although she had acted for best, according to her own lights, in aiding and abetting Sir James' determination to marry Nora, still Marion now suffered all the more for the share she had had in bringing poor Nora into such tragic straits. She knew it was morbidly foolish to reproach herself, nevertheless, under the influence of the shock, she could not help it, and was, therefore, the more eager to busy herself with work, rather than give herself too much time for thought. Her whole character and nature rendered her averse to all morbidness, or waste of energy in bootless brooding.

It was on Marion's earnest, loving face that Nora's eyes first rested as, after alarmingly prolonged hours of unconsciousness, she once more opened them. She looked dazedly, inquiringly, uttering never a word. Then with a groan that told all there was to say of her painful return of memory, she turned her face to the wall, and so lay for what seemed to Marion an eternity. Whether she had relapsed into

unconsciousness, she knew not, and dared not speak for fear of jarring and bewildering the poor, overwrought mind. So she contented herself with taking the limp, unresisting hand in her own, sitting patiently by the bed-side, waiting. To let Nora feel her nearness, her sympathy, her readiness to do anything in her power, with that must she, for the present, content herself.

Mr. Merivale had arranged to return immediately to England with Sir James' remains. He had loved him as his own son, and his poor old heart, under all his learning and science, bled and ached like that of the most simple-minded. He longed to give an account of the accident as it happened with such marvelous suddenness under his own eye; and, as this was impossible in Nora's present condition, the idea suggested itself to Marion to take down, from Mr. Merivale's dictation, a minute account of that dreadful day; thus putting aside, until Nora should be able to bear them, all the melancholy details.

As she wrote, it was all so simple that the tragic outcome seemed incredible. The gist of the account was this: The party, carefully avoiding all hazardous enterprises, confined themselves to passing up the gorge which lay between the Hackenstock and its neighbor; then climbing the former, which, as we all know, faces, at a certain point, the great glacier of the Trenthorn—one of the most beautiful sights in Switzerland, and an excursion which a child might make with perfect safety. The lovely, narrow, green valley below; the ice-fields growing gradually into

view as they climbed, were things which, even in his deep sorrow, Mr. Merivale could not refrain from dilating upon.

The silent Professor had, as was his wont, been absolutely pre-occupied all the way, searching for floral treasures, and had had but little attention to spare for the larger beauties of nature. Presently, the party stopping to look at the view near a projecting rock, which from its description reminded Marion of Table Rock at Niagara, the Professor's eye fell upon a tiny pink flower projecting its delicate head within arm's length of the rock. His eyes gleamed with covetous eagerness behind his spectacles, and he, quickly going down on his knees, reached out his hand for it. The flower alone would not suffice; the plant being a rare one, still unrepresented in his collection, it would be advisable to procure roots and all, if possible. In his eagerness, he approached nearer and nearer to the edge of the rock. Sir James, who stood nearest, cried out: "For Heaven's sake, Jerrold, hold back, or you'll be over." The words were scarce out of his mouth when the Professor, evidently feeling his balance going, made a struggle to regain a firmer position. Sir James made one step forward, caught the Professor by his coat. The edge of the rock, no doubt washed and loosened from beneath, gave way just where the sudden weight of Sir James' foot came upon it, and both men, with the severed piece of rock, fell into the gorge below, out of which they had just climbed.

It was with a voice broken by sobs that the poor old man gave this account, with many, many more details than are necessary here. To him it seemed incredible that so trivial a cause could produce so disproportionate and tragical a result.

The following morning Marion stood, one silent mourner, watching the funeral procession take its sad way down the mountain-side to the little town below, on its way home. Then she slowly turned, and, wiping her eyes, went back to her post at Nora's side.

## LVIII.

### JACK AS CONSOLER.

The house felt doubly melancholy, Marion's responsibility doubly heavy, now that those good old people had gone. It was almost more than her own stout heart could bear alone, this isolation and anxiety. For Nora's condition was most unsatisfactory. She was ill,—ill as she had never been in her life. But for the frequent visits of the two medical men, both of whom were interested in these two women, not only as patient and nurse, but as suffering human beings, Marion now wonders how she could have had the courage to drag through those hard and anxious times.

The days began to grow into weeks, in fact, before the fever finally left, and Nora, weak enough not to care whether she lived or died, was pronounced out of danger, then convalescent. The virgin-vine that hung about her window was already turning red when she was first allowed to be moved to her sofa.

They all said she was too quiet; that if she could only cry more it would be better and more natural.

But the shock seemed in a measure to have paralyzed her sensibilities; to have made her dully apathetic.

The good doctors said that she acted like one who had been laboring under a prolonged strain, apart from the shock,—in itself enough to shake her reason. Quiet, rest, improved health, and, above all, time, would bring her back to her usual self, no doubt, youth being on her side.

Marion did not know her for the Nora of old, so silent, dull-eyed, and indifferent to everything. She would lie for hours at a time, content to look out between the blood-red leaves that encircled her window, at the blue sky beyond, thinking—always thinking.

At last came a day when Marion was summoned from the room by Jeanne, whose face was a wonderful mixture of weeping sorrow and smiling joy.

Marion returned. "Nora, will you see Jack?" she asked, half timidly.

Nora turned her head quickly, looking at her with eyes that seemed to have grown, of late, out of all proportion to her face. "Of course," said she.

Jack was quickly brought to Nora's sofa. She sat up, threw her arms around the good fellow's neck, and burst into a storm of tears and sobs.

"Thank God," said Marion to herself, leaving the room on tip-toe.

## LIX.

### WIPING OUT OLD SCORES.

To be taken back to the old, familiar nest was the one wish Nora expressed; therefore, as soon as Doctor Jack decided that it was wise to leave the Hackenstock, they returned to the little apartment in the rue Selviac.

Since the day of Jack's arrival, Nora had, by degrees, become more like her old self, though still sadly weak; "a wreck as regards looks," Marion averred, shaking her head. The cheerful surroundings and happy associations of the little Paris home soothed and comforted her; but she was slow, remarkably slow in regaining her strength and, above all, her interest in life.

Jack tried to rouse her by accounts of the progress of matters at home, especially that of his own love-affairs. This latter subject was the most successful of all in kindling a spark of interest in Nora's eyes, which had, of late, taken on such a far-away look. He told her how he had passed some of the happiest months of his life between, on the one hand, the delight of seeing the softening light in Mildred's eyes at his approach—the evident dependence upon him

that was growing upon her—in fact, her love; and on the other hand, the satisfaction of daily intercourse with his dear old friend Paul, who had returned to New York in the spring.

He did not tell how Paul, fairly choking with the necessity of talking out his trouble, had opened his heart to Jack; had laid before him the whole unhappy story, only suppressing Lilian's name where its mention would have given her brother bitter pain and mortification. He had talked out his love, his pain; his fear of having, in the end, definitely offended Nora in their last interview, the memory of which had brought out most prominently all that was rude, rough and offensive in his conduct—as he called it to himself. Of this Jack said nothing, but often talked of his friend; of their sympathy of ideas, aims, and so on.

Paul had never told Jack of the ferment of bitter rage that had filled him ever since his meeting with Nora at Monte Carlo, and his discovery of Lilian's treachery—a rage that seemed to him quite just, quite righteous. He desired no revenge for the bitter wrong done him; he only wished that Lilian might know that her poor, contemptible trick was perfectly well understood by those most concerned. Yet, situated as he was as the intimate friend of her brother, the position was a delicate one, requiring the use of much tact. In Paul's character and life there had been rather less diplomacy than bluntness; more courageous force than delicate finesse. Of this peculiarity of his nature he was quite aware, and it re-

quired his sincere friendship and loyalty to make him exercise great control over himself, and a kind of censorship, as it were, of his manner and attitude toward the entire Stanley family. Had he followed his impulse of honest indignation, he would never again have darkened the door of the house in which Lilian lived. But for Jack's sake and the former kindly hospitality of Jack's parents, he forced himself to call—as rarely as possible, be it admitted, but still, enough to prevent comment. This, however, did not satisfy the determination that possessed him, that Lilian must not be allowed to flatter herself that her behavior to him remained a secret of her own.

No opportunity, no way of approaching the subject offered itself. He feared by creating the opportunity, to defeat his object by his clumsiness. With the dogged tenacity of purpose which lay in his nature, he watched his chance and bided his time.

It was not until he had already been at home for several weeks that he chanced to meet Lilian at a dinner-party at the Darcys—the very house where the ball had taken place, which had been so fateful to him. After dinner, when the moment came for the men to return to the drawing-room, Paul, perceiving Lilian seated by herself at the other end of the room, went over, and, with apparent nonchalant politeness, took the vacant seat beside her. Being a tall, rather broad, large man, his movements never had anything very rapid or light about them; on the contrary, a certain dignity and aplomb. They were, on this occasion, slower, more deliberate than ever. But to—

night, under this calm exterior was an amount of concentrated righteous wrath, the discovery of the full measure of which would have sufficed to paralyze Lilian's small soul. Above the tumult of his own feelings, the dominating thought of Jack and their friendship served to make him use all the restraint and tact that he was capable of.

"Curious coincidence, Mrs. Persé, that almost our first meeting after all these years should be in the very house where we parted."

Lilian looked up at him for a moment with a suggestion of the baby-coquetry of those old days, and, looking down again, blushed ever so little.

"Do you remember the ball that last night?"

Lilian played with her fan, flashed a look up at him, but only for an instant. Though far from understanding the drift of Paul's remarks, her eyes could not meet his fairly. "I do remember," she said, in a low voice.

"There are some awfully curious things that turn up as one goes through life—for instance, one is that I should come back after all these years to find you married to the very man whom you told me your cousin was to marry, that night at the ball. I might have a right to wonder how that marriage had come to be broken off, did it not happen that your cousin told me, the other day, that she had never been engaged to him. I suppose you would prefer now not to have it thought that he *had* been engaged to her. It is all very complicated and confusing. In fact, Mrs. Persé, the results of your action of that

evening have not proved worth the—how shall I put it, to be perfectly polite and respectful to you as a woman? Were I talking to a man, the word would be easily and quickly found; but I respect your sex, and out of deference to it, would avoid harsh expressions—shall we say, was hardly worth the artificial light you threw upon it?”

Lilian's face was crimson and her fingers picked nervously at her fan.

“Whatever your object was, I do not pretend to understand. What the results are, you must have had ample opportunity to study, and without that amount of satisfaction which would be flattering to your vanity. You succeeded, yes, in chasing me away—if that was your object; you knew at the time, that you caused me pain—if that was your object; but you did not reach your cousin—if that was your object. She was untouched because, thank Heaven, she had not loved me, and is now the happy and cherished wife of a most excellent and honorable man of enviable popularity and position. Whatever you tried to do, this is what you have done, and out of it all, you—” He felt the strain upon his temper, and the fear of saying what he never would forgive himself for as Jack's friend; so he got up to leave her; but before doing so, he bent toward her, as she sat there, shrinking from him, as white now as she had been crimson when he first began to speak.

“Before I go, I simply want to say to you that your cousin Nora and I have talked over the whole occurrence of that evening, and both know the part

you played in it. You have not succeeded in spoiling either her life or mine, so help me Heaven. I will now say good-evening. I suppose we shall not see much of each other hereafter, but, for Jack's sake, I trust we may keep up at least the semblance of an acquaintance. Good-night." Paul bowed and withdrew, being shortly after deep in politics with his host and some other men.

Lilian was "ill" to the extent of keeping her room for several days after the dinner-party. Her nerves were in a bad way, as could have been testified to by her parents, her husband, and her patient and long suffering maid.

Already for years, ever since Paul's disappearance the night of the ball, she had been pleased to dislike him; but from this memorable evening she made no secret of her cordial aversion; never missing an opportunity of expressing her opinion of him, and her surprise at Jack's blind infatuation.

## LX.

### A SAD HEART.

Talking of Mildred, Jack had come to the conclusion that it was all rubbish to wait until he had finished his studies. In fact, to tell the truth, there was already an understanding between them. Why not marry and bring her over with him when, having taken his diploma at home, he should come for the year he proposed to spend in the Paris hospitals? "Why should I delay adding the best miniature to the collection?" he asked, looking up at Nora with the old merry glance, and thinking of Mildred's diminutive size.

If Nora was at that time capable of any feeling of happiness, it certainly must have been aroused by the news of the fruition of all her plans and hopes for Jack. He looked well and content—what more could she wish? As, lying on her sofa, she looked at him from under her drooped lids, it seemed to her as though his dear face had taken upon it, these last few months, a more serious, earnest look, when in repose, than it had ever worn before. He gave her the impression of a man who had at last found the right road

locum tenens to fill the post left vacant by Jeanne's promotion. But in the old days, where all had been activity and ambition, there now reigned quiet, apathetic indifference, inactivity. Even Marion herself had been obliged to give into other hands much of the accumulated work of the past months; for, from the time she had started with Nora for America before the marriage, she had had no time for her own affairs. But what mattered anything now, but to see the color come back to Nora's cheeks and the light to her eyes?

Marion's love for Nora was a beautiful combination of the love of the mother for her child, and that of the friend for her soul's mate—she counted nothing a sacrifice that she could do for the other's happiness.

The winter coming, she took Nora, by advice of the physician, to San Moritz, to try what bracing air would do. But the little nest in the rue Selviac pleased her best, and they were soon back again.

So time wore on, gradually, very gradually bringing with it strength; but the apathy remained. Nora seemed to have lost the secret of interest in life.



## LXI.

### DREAMS.

Marion one day received a note, which she answered; all without comment, though in Nora's presence. The following day at the hour when Nora was taking her prescribed rest, Marion received a visitor in the drawing-room. She made no mention of either fact to Nora; but from this time forth, she herself wore a much more cheerful expression than for months past. In fact, the Marion of the old days reappeared, and once more began to rally, to chaff, to laugh Nora back to the tone of the old times.

"Do try and take up your music, your singing, again, dear child," said she one day; "or that painting you spent so much time over, is it to be quite thrown aside? Is that right? I fear you are giving in to yourself and getting very lazy. Come now, let us make an effort." It was like trying to push into motion a heavy load that has come to a stand-still going up-hill. But finally, by dint of cajoling, teasing, prodding, goading, at last the wheels started once more, feebly at first, but enough to satisfy and encourage Marion.

Summer, and its absence from town, came and



went. It was now more than a year since that black day in Switzerland. A second birthday had gone by, carefully unobserved by either. They lived, once more, calm, well-filled lives; there was more color in Nora's face, more elasticity in her step, and her eyes looked once more like the Nora of old.

The subject of her brief married life was seldom mentioned between the friends. Once Nora had said dreamily: "Friendship, loyalty, duty—all these one would lay down one's life for; but it is the beauty of the earth on a grey day; the beauty of a perfect body without the life-spark; unless love glorifies the whole, making the sun that shines upon the earth, and the spark that warms the heart into life!" Marion wondered within herself if Nora had in mind her marriage, but made no comment.

The season for open windows had not yet quite gone by in Paris, when, one afternoon, lying resting in her own room, Nora's ear was caught by a sound—a voice not far-distant, singing. The song was familiar. She laid down the book she had been trying to read; crossed her hands, and settled herself to listen. It was a pleasant voice, a barytone; well-taught, and managed in a way that satisfied her critical ear. The tune—where had she heard it? Where? Memory set to work, wandered back, back, until at last she saw the music-room at Duke's Lodge. Through the window beyond, the snow could be seen falling, softly, quietly. It had been snowing all the morning, keeping everyone indoors. There had been much music-making to wile away the time; mostly poor—very

amateurish, until a man sang who had only arrived late the night before—had been introduced to her—He had been different from the others; he had sung with taste, cultivation, feeling. The words of the song came back to her now:

“I whispered it low to the leaves;  
They scattered it far and wide.  
I told it the trees as I passed,  
And the wind took it up and replied:  
‘The story is old, ever old,  
Yet new as the day-light each day;  
It belongs to all countries and lands,  
And liveth forever and aye!’”

(Unpublished verses of I. M. P., Sept., 1900.)

Yes—that was where memory traced the song to. Strange to meet it again here in Paris! No doubt some English or American student, comforting himself in his home-sickness. She hoped he would often practice at that hour—it was pleasant to lie there and be entertained—to think! Link by link, as she listened in the days that followed, the old story of her girlish love came back to her; step by step she went over it again. It hurt to think of it—she would almost rather not—but yet, it was at the same time, very sweet! The dear old days! The dear, delightful exchange of thought—Ah, me! had anything ever been equal to it, after all? Why, why had she ever given up her dream, her ideal? She had done so; and the experience and suffering of these last years she had drawn upon herself, by her own act,

deliberately. But she had not known then that he had ever really loved her. She blamed no one, Marion least of all, for being too coldly, wisely practical, too sensible—only the succession of events which had combined to drift her into an imaginary condition of forgetfulness. Imaginary, she repeated to herself. For, after all, there never had been, never would be but one real, true love in her life—there never could be. She had made a mistake; it had come terribly near being a fatal one. Respect and loyal duty she had given to her husband of a few months, and affectionate friendship; he had known it, and had accepted just what she could give. She was free from all blame toward him; but she mourned in her heart the loss of her ideal; longing for that which beautifies life, and makes all the hard paths easy—love.



## LXII.

### A CONSPIRACY.

There came later a day when a visitor was announced for her. Mr. King! She did not know whether to be more pleased or frightened! There was their last interview still fresh before her mind. How stiff and cold she had been! How, under her reticent and distant manner, her heart had beat with terror at the memory of the power he had formerly possessed over her peace of mind. How she had dreaded his presence; how thankful when he had gone, leaving her once more with only the memory of him, to be fought down, for the sake of loyalty and honor. She had conquered then; she had been strong; but it taught her to beware of herself—and of him.

She kept him waiting, for she was too proud to let him see how the old memories had disturbed her. When she at last entered the room, Paul came forward with such a pleasant, natural manner, that she found herself quite at ease after a moment or two. The conversation, guided almost entirely by Paul, touched lightly upon this, that or the other subject, keeping at a safe distance from anything that might

arouse embarrassing, painful memories. The visit was very short. Nora was glad to have seen him again; to feel that they might once more meet to talk and enjoy each other without any "tragics," as Marion would have said.

"Eh bien! He is nice, isn't he?" asked this latter when the two met later. "I withdraw anything I may have said or thought against him. I had feared a kind of Admirable Crichton and Apollo rolled into one. But he is nothing of the kind. Good-enough looking, yes; but not at all a marvel. I have grown quite fond of him. He reminds me of dear Doctor Jack, who, to my mind, is the nicest fellow in the world"—Marion chatted on, Nora perceiving by degrees that Marion and Paul had been cultivating each other's acquaintance for some time past.

"To confess the truth," said Marion later on; "Mr. King has been here, off and on, since Jack's return to New York. They thought some friend should be near—didn't deem *me* sufficient protection! So Mr. King, having nothing better to do, established himself as a sort of guard. He has been strangely unwilling to come face to face with you—seemed to think it might annoy you. But I urged him to come just for these few moments. You didn't mind, did you?"

Paul, having broken the ice, came again, came often; encouraged Nora to renewed enterprise, to take up her occupations once more.

"May I sing with you some times? It would be a great pleasure—perhaps a mutual encouragement to study?" So it came about that the voice that had sung her back to memories of the happy past, now sang her into hope of possible happiness to come.

## LVIII.

### AT LAST.

Spring was there again! Spring with its new life, its buds and blossoms. The chestnut trees of the Champs Elysées were one bower of bloom. Paris was at its loveliest moment of the year. The very atmosphere seemed charged with cheerfulness and hope.

Paul's visits at the rue Selviac had gradually come to be a matter of course. "In fact," said Marion to herself in a half-jealous mood, "the whole day seems to lead up to Mr. King's visit. If this keeps on, I shall be driven to do something desperate."

On this particular day, Paul was standing with his back to the door, looking out of the window at the near-by green of the Luxembourg Gardens. So it happened that Nora stood for an instant looking at him before he, becoming aware of her presence, turned to meet her.

"Nora," he cried, holding out both hands toward her impulsively. She silently put her hands in his. They came, fluttering, to rest in his broader palms as a tired bird to its nest.

"Nora! Love me, darling! I have loved and

suffered so long!" He bent down and kissed each little hand in turn. "Why make any further pretence between us, when I am fairly dying of love for you!" and he drew her to him, slipping his arm around her slender waist.

"Ah, Paul! Do I not love you, indeed!" And her eyes looked into his, expressing for once, fully, frankly, all their love. "It frightens me to think how much I do love you! I ate my heart out until I almost hated you for the torment you caused me!"

He clasped her in his arms. What were all their sufferings in comparison to this one moment of rapturous happiness!

"At last, at last. Thank Heaven!" said Paul, and Nora's heart echoed his words.

There was so much to tell, to explain, once the flood-gates were open, that it was as if a life-time would not suffice them to say it all.

Indeed it seemed scarce a moment before Nora's ear caught the sound of Marion's approach. As she opened the door, Nora took Paul's hand and brought him forward, her eyes half tearful, her face radiant with happiness. Marion looked from one to the other, and understood. "You beautiful pair!" said she to herself. Her heart brimmed over with sympathetic joy for these two so nearly separated forever, so that she was forced to content herself with expressing her feeling in dumb show, or make a fool of herself.

"This is all well enough for you, you foolish, happy lovers," she said presently, when her compos-

ure had returned sufficiently. "Love is ever selfish. What is to become of me, I'd like to know, robbed of my one ewe-lamb?"

"You will live with us, dear, and never again work to earn a penny," said Nora, turning to Paul, as if to express the feeling of both.

"No-no; never. I love you too well to be ever a chronic third. Let us drink a cup of tea to all our happinesses, and try to get used to the idea."

Jeanne brought in the tray; and, notwithstanding Marion's mournful view of her own case, never was there in the world a happier trio than now sat around the tea-table.

"May I mention my own affairs?" asked Marion, presently. "I have been to the Salon, as I usually do go at this season, with a friend of long-standing"—

"Mr. Massinger?" asked Nora, quickly. "May I tell Paul about him? We have no secrets now, have we, dear? Paul, this Mr. Massinger is an admirer of Marion's, who is the most patient and persistent creature you ever knew. He offers himself at stated intervals"—

"Oh Nora! You are telling tales out of school," exclaimed Marion deprecatingly.

"He does, though," insisted Nora, undeterred. "He is convinced that if he perseveres long enough, there must come a day when Marion will consent out of sheer weariness—just to get rid of him!"

"He always comes over in May from England to visit the Salon, and I naturally go with him"—

"And he invariably proposes," supplements Nora, laughing.

"You are a witch, Nora—it is true! He did; and I, suspecting what must inevitably happen to you two, and having grown accustomed to having **some one** to fuss over and take care of"—

"Have accepted him," exclaimed Nora and Paul in a breath.

"No; not exactly; but I refused him with a shade less finality, as it were. If I end by consenting to order his dinner and sew on his buttons for the rest of his days, you will be responsible," Marion concluded, in mock reproach.

## LIX.

### THE CURTAIN FALLS.

A long, low, rambling brick house. Beyond, a velvety green, stretching away as far as the eye can reach, dotted here and there with groups of trees. From beyond a distant grove a thin curl of blue smoke rises lazily in the still air. All is restful to the eye; the soft atmosphere imparts a sense of peace.

A pony is being slowly led along the carriage-way before the house, to all appearances consciously careful of the precious burden on his back, which is held in its place by a firm, strong hand. A second toddling child closes the little procession.

In the vine-covered porch stand two women watching the scene with laughing faces and keen interest.

It is a great day, for Paul is giving his eldest son his first riding-lesson.

Nora, handsome, matronly, happy, and her good old friend Marion, from her little home down yonder among the trees, are watching with equal pride the progress of the lesson.

"And you are really never home-sick, living over here in England?"

"How could I be? Wherever *they* are is home, to me," answered Nora, her face beaming with love and pride. "Moreover, we are both fond of peace."

"I understand. At home peace and Lilian are not compatible."

THE END.

